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FRENCH NEW WAVE

CONTEMPORARY WORLD CINEMA

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THE COLLECTIVE

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STILLS: Special thanks to Cinémathèque Ontario and Richard Lippe.

FRONT COVER: Anna Karina, Jean-Luc Godard's *Vivre Sa Vie*, 1962

INSIDE FRONT: Jean-Paul Belmondo, Jean-Pierre Melville's *Le Doulos*, 1963

BACK COVER: Françoise Dorléac and Catherine Deneuve, Jacques Demy's *Les Demoiselles de Rochefort*, 1967



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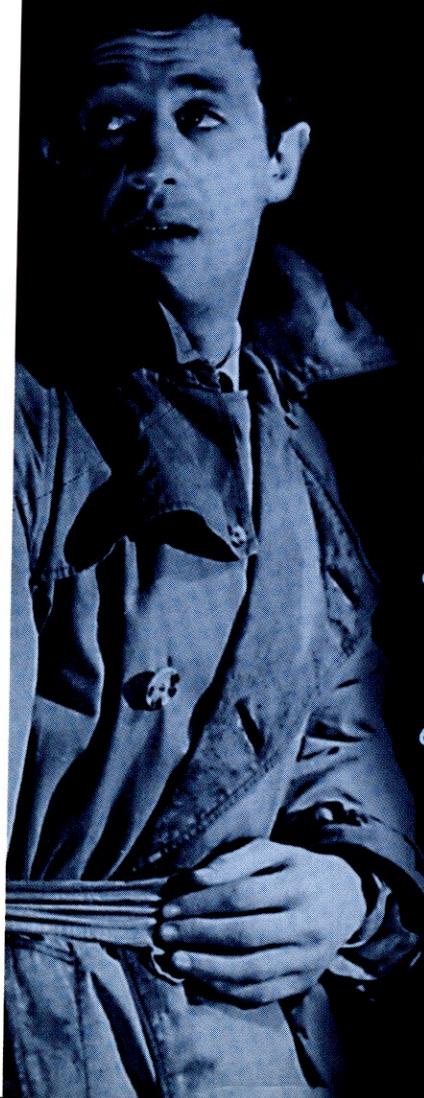
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FRENCH NEW WAVE

40th ANNIVERSARY

This issue celebrates the fortieth anniversary of the French New Wave, its directors, creative output and the legacy the movement has given to film culture. The radical impulse that guided the New Wave filmmakers is found in the pages of the 1950s *Cahiers du Cinéma*. The journal served as a forum for a reevaluation of French and American cinema. *Cahiers* also provided a space for a number of young critics, most prominently François Truffaut, Jean-Luc Godard, Claude Chabrol, Eric Rohmer, Jacques Rivette, to voice critical concerns which were eventually given a material embodiment in their films.

One of the founding tenets of the movement was to encourage freedom for an artist to create a work that openly expressed a personal vision. In part, this was a reaction to the French film industry which was seen as producing a manufactured product with a formulaic base. While *Cahiers* critics recognized the value of genre and cinematic conventions, they advocated using film language as a point of departure for films that were individual creative expressions. Henri Langlois' Cinémathèque and the Parisian cinéclubs provided an invaluable opportunity for cinéastes to view a diversified body of films necessary to informed critical practice.

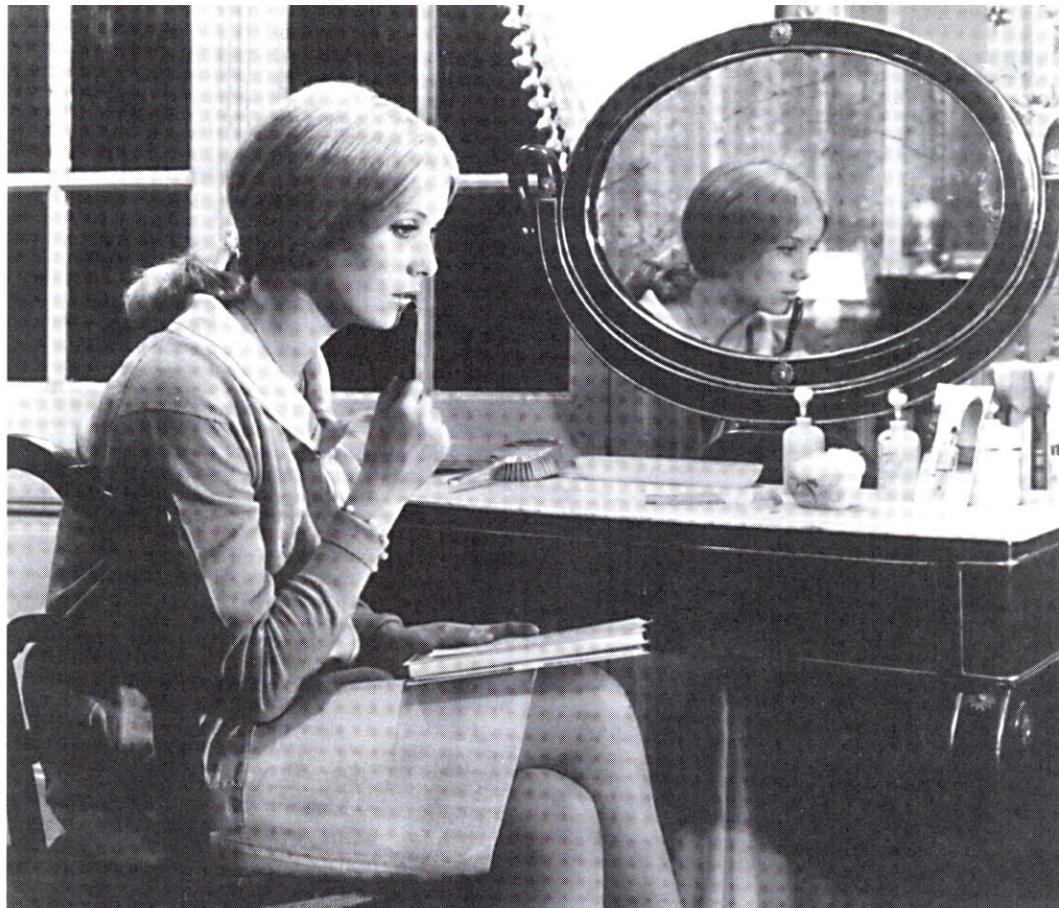
The historical placement of the New Wave movement within post World War II Europe was essential to its existence. Rossellini, and the neo-realist movement in general, was a formative influence on the *Cahiers*

François Truffaut's *Les Quatre Cents Coups*, 1959. The introduction of Jean-Pierre Léaud as Truffaut's alter-ego.





Jean-Luc Godard's *A bout de souffle*, 1959



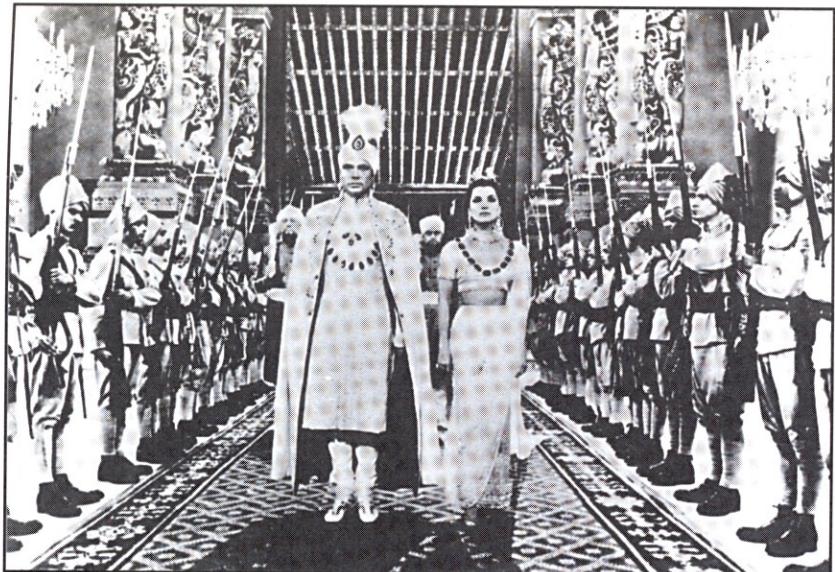
Jacques Demy's *Les Parapluies de Cherbourg*, 1964

Jacques Demy's *La Baie des Anges*, 1963. Jeanne Moreau, a favorite actress of the New Wave filmmakers.



critics. The neo-realist dictum of stressing historical urgency, of using films as an intervention in the reality of post war society by taking the camera onto the streets, was seminal to their conception of the function of the filmmaker. Neo-realism was a politicized aesthetic in that its practitioners perceived their work to be a necessary contribution to the process of reconstructing a decimated world. The concept of film as entertainment entrenched in the classical Hollywood cinema or in the various national versions ("cinéma de papa") was radically altered by the neo-realist commitment to using cinema to re-envision a social world that would regain a sense of meaning, value and even spirituality. The New Wave filmmakers, inspired by neo-realism, Alexandre Astruc's notion of the 'caméra stylé' and benefitting from new advancements in the area of film technology—particularly lightweight, portable camera and sound equipment—began producing works that reflected their immediate environment and contemporary world as they perceived it (Jean Rouch's groundbreaking ethnographic documentaries and the cinéma vérité movement helped shape this direction in filmmaking). The New Wave films, highly personal in style and content, portrayed a sense of immediacy and the quality of a direct recording of a social moment.

This movement towards integrating reality and a sense of spontaneity into fictional forms extended beyond filmmaking. For instance, in the immediate post World War II period, the Paris-based Magnum Photo agency was founded by several prominent photojournalists, including Robert Capa, Henri Cartier-Bresson and George Rodger. Magnum elevated photojournalism to the level of an aesthetic which equally valued art, social life and popular culture. The

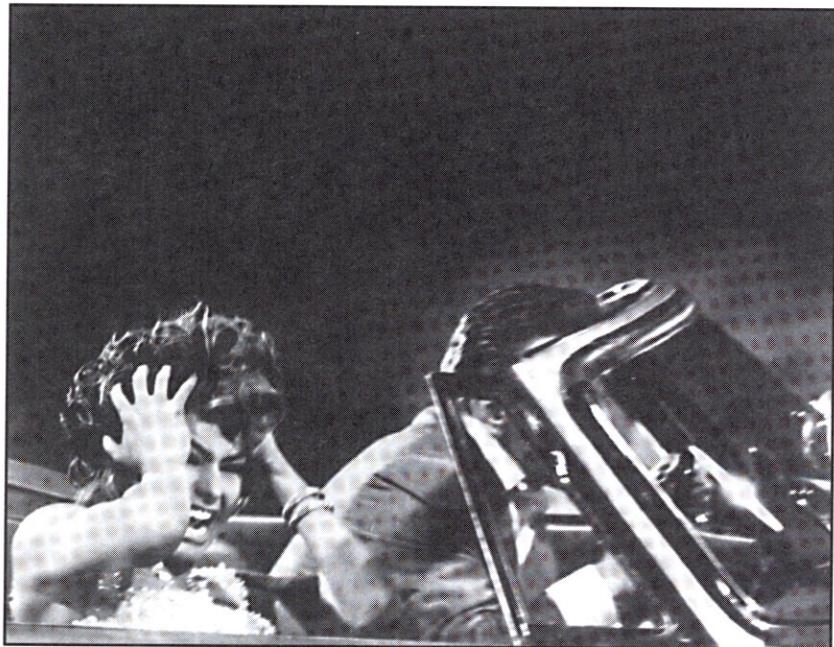


PAGES 4-5: DIRECTORS CHAMPIONED BY THE CRITICS OF CAHIERS

TOP: Fritz Lang's two-part, three hour Indian adventure film *The Tiger of Eschnuapur*. Barely known outside Europe even in its grotesquely hacked, dubbed and mistitled version *Tigress of Bengal*, the film was hailed in *Cahiers* as one of the peaks of Lang's achievement.

CENTRE: *Two Weeks in Another Town*. Minnelli's work was especially celebrated for his virtuosic *mise-en-scène*.

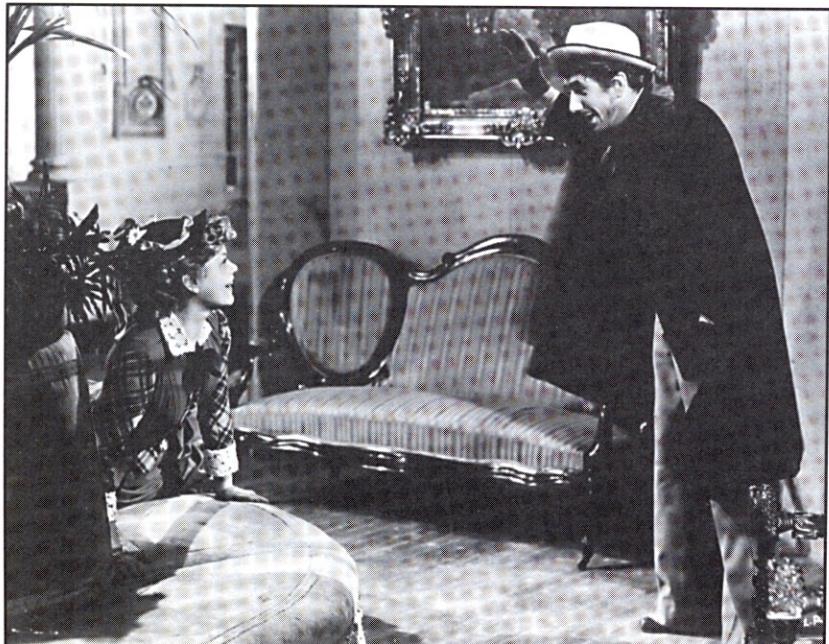
BOTTOM: Max Ophuls' *Le Plaisir*. Ophuls' personal vision was embraced by the New Wave filmmakers. Demy's *Lola* pays tribute to Ophuls' Lola Montès.



Magnum assignments included Hollywood celebrities and movie set location shoots, reaffirming the intimate connection between still photography and motion pictures. The creative confluence of 1950s photojournalism and 35mm feature-length fiction film production perhaps was most fully celebrated with *Little Fugitive* (1953), which received the Silver Lion of San Marco at the Venice Film Festival and was also nominated for an Academy Award, written and directed by Ray Ashley, Morris Engel and Ruth Orkin. Orkin, although not a Magnum photographer, was a well-known photojournalist. Interestingly, according to Orkin's book, *A Photo Journal* (New York: The Viking Press, 1981), François Truffaut, in a 1960 *New Yorker* magazine interview acknowledged the influence, claiming "The French New Wave would never have come into being if it hadn't been for *Little Fugitive*."

The integration of fictional strategies and conventions with documentary aesthetics was fundamental to the New Wave. This not only transgressed the boundaries of cinematic practices usually treated discreetly, but also invited the viewer to rethink life historically—to identify with a narrative fiction that is rooted in contemporary social conditions. The concept of narrativity itself was reformulated, challenging the mainstream cinema and its adherence to a conventional narrative structure and closure and, by implication, the dominant ideological dictates which shaped this cinema. Jean-Luc Godard developed the format of the essay film. His films can be read as meditations on contemporary life. The fictional diegesis is fragmented and interspersed with interviews, direct camera address, location shooting, consumer goods and pop culture references which function to explore and question the reality of both art and daily life.

André Bazin, a founding editor and contributor to *Cahiers du Cinéma*, greatly influenced the theoretical ideas that shaped the New Wave directors' thinking through his promotion of *mise-en-scène* filmmaking and a realist aesthetic which he felt best fulfilled the potentials of the medium. Based on his definition of *mise-en-scène* filmmaking Bazin was able to redefine realism in a way that included forms as diverse as classical Hollywood and



TOP: *Eléna et les Hommes*.

For Godard, Renoir's film was 'The definition of cinema.'

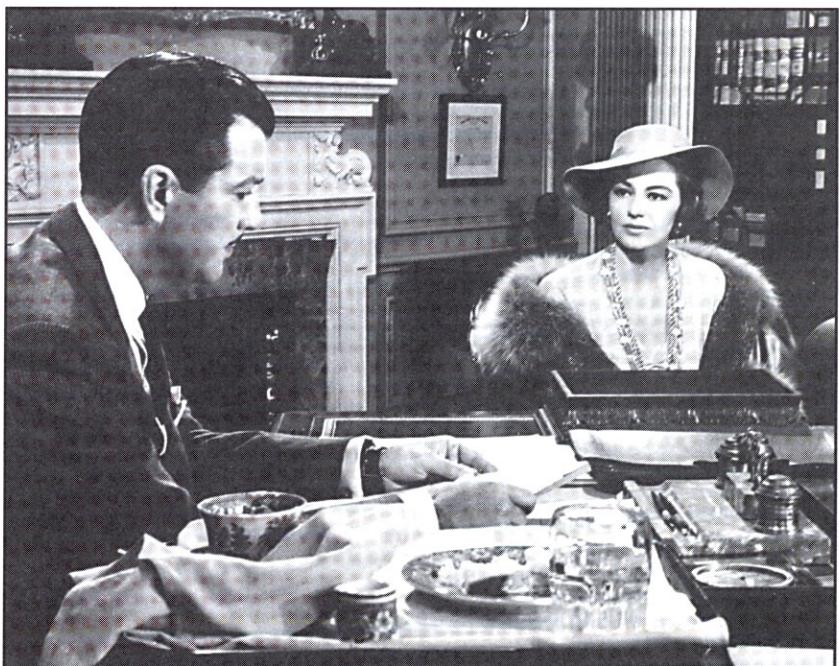
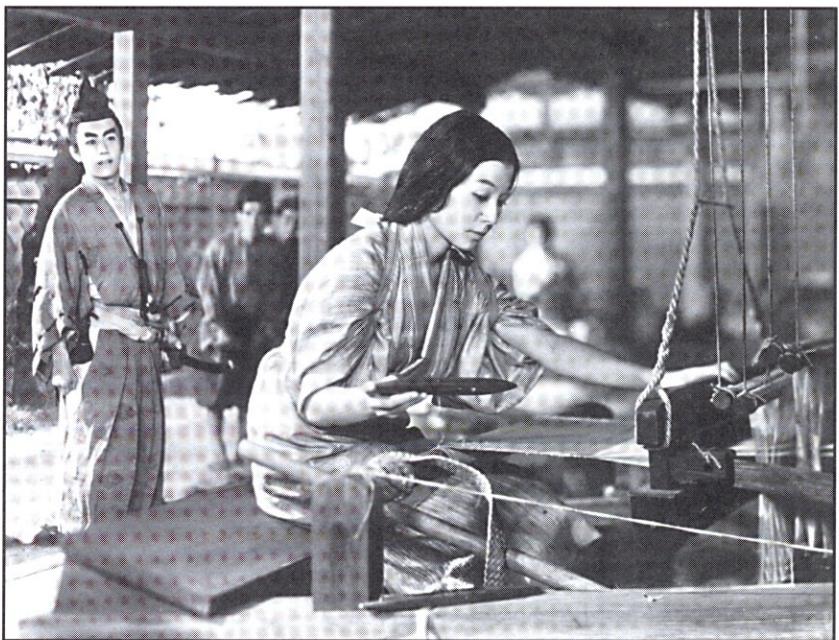
CENTRE: *Chikamatsu Monogatari*. Mizoguchi was consistently celebrated as one of cinema's 'grand masters.'

BOTTOM: *Party Girl*. Outside France, the *Cahiers* critics' championship of Nicholas Ray's gangster film was taken as the ultimate proof of their communal insanity. *Cahiers* saw a masterpiece of *mise-en-scène*; Anglo-Saxon critics saw only a banal plot.



neo-realism. Bazin's commitment to the Hollywood cinema and his appreciation of particular directors and genres was as essential to the New Wave movement as was the impact of neo-realism to the post World War II cinema. Bazin and the New Wave critics embraced Hollywood's reliance on conventions and genre filmmaking, but also admired the way self-expressive, creative directors would use that basis to mediate other concerns with which an audience could identify. The Hollywood cinema was capable of addressing significant cultural tensions and relevant moral and ethical issues within the guise of popular entertainment. Alfred Hitchcock's films, for example, were championed by *Cahiers du Cinéma*; its critics valued his artistry, concerns with human nature, morality and questions of identity and the self-reflexive nature of many of the films. The works of directors such as Hitchcock, John Ford and Howard Hawks evidenced the potential to use the studio systems without compromising intelligence and artistic value.

When film criticism became more politicized, from the late 1960s on in *Cahiers* and other journals, the early films of the New Wave movement and its critical discourse that had privileged authorship and realism was judged by some to be politically conservative, informed by Bazin's Catholicism and humanist thinking. This generalization tends to ignore the more progressive and potentially liberating elements found in the works of filmmakers who influenced the New Wave directors, and in their own films. For instance, the Rossellini-Bergman collaborations after the Second World War provided a body of work that is distinctly feminist in its approach to gender relations and their place within a patriarchal/bourgeois/ capitalist society in desperate need of redefinition. Rossellini's use of Bergman draws elements from her Hollywood persona—her physicality, integrity, innate moral sense—but displaces her within an alien environment which works to foreground the question of a woman's place in contemporary society. Godard borrows from this in his characterizations of Jean Seberg in *Breathless*, Anna Karina in *Vivre Sa Vie*, Brigitte Bardot in *Contempt* and in a number of his other 1960s films. Godard's conception of gender is more problema-





Claude Chabrol's *Les Bonnes Femmes*, 1960.

A bout de Souffle



TOP: Otto Preminger's *Bonjour Tristesse*, 1958. According to a *Cahiers* critic "The greatest film in Cinemascope."

BOTTOM: Jean-Pierre Melville's *Le Doulas*, 1963



N.Y.

tized; however his awareness of gender inequality in the capitalist world, often dramatized as prostitution in its many manifestations, raises concerns that were later taken up full force through the woman's movement.

Chabrol's *Les Bonnes Femmes* is a case in point. The film's foregrounding of women's issues was recognized by critics at the time (*Claude Chabrol*, ed. Robin Wood and Michael Walker, 1970), but seen from a contemporary position, the film's presentation of gender and class relations and the precariousness of the woman's position is remarkably radical. Given its date, 1960, the film's critique of a masculine social system designed to control and denigrate women is shockingly insightful and still relevant. Beyond the critique of a masculine-dominant culture, the film's depiction of women's experience, their sense of alienation, boredom and oppression is strikingly aware. The film's blend of genre, its use of melodrama and the horror film, is tempered by its realist location shooting and *vérité* tone and ambience (stunningly photographed by Henri Decae). *Les Bonnes Femmes'* refusal of closure—its ending is presented as a statement of protest—is exemplary of the strength of the New Wave sensibility.

Peter Harcourt's article on Jean-Luc Godard's recent films attests to the continued significance of Godard's presence and ongoing contribution to film culture. Robin Wood introduces his article by acknowledging the legacy of the New Wave in contemporary international cinema. These essays and the others on the New Wave are offered as a homage to the New Wave and its ongoing meaning and value.

The New Wave critic/filmmakers consistently displayed a genuine passion and commitment to the notion that criticism and art are central to daily life and experience, and are something alive and vital. This issue pays tribute to that spirit.

Finally, we thank the Toronto International Film Festival for screening a number of films that don't always find distribution; the articles on contemporary world cinema were written in conjunction with the 1998 festival.

Florence Jacobowitz and Richard Lippe



by Peter Harcourt

Calculated Approximations of Probabilities

Rhetorical strategies in the late films of Jean-Luc Godard

To perceive universal mutation, to feel the vanity of life,
has always been the beginning of seriousness.

It is the condition for any beautiful,
measured, or tender philosophy.

Three Philosophical Poets (1910)
by George Santayana

Although the situation is changing, since Godard made his comeback in 1979 with *Sauve qui peut (la vie)*, there has been a distinct absence of commentary on his work. Critics who had championed him felt either baffled or betrayed. Afraid that he had relinquished politics for a celebration of the image, the academic community dropped him into that vat of neglect where rest once prestigious film innovators like Ingmar Bergman and Michelangelo Antonioni.

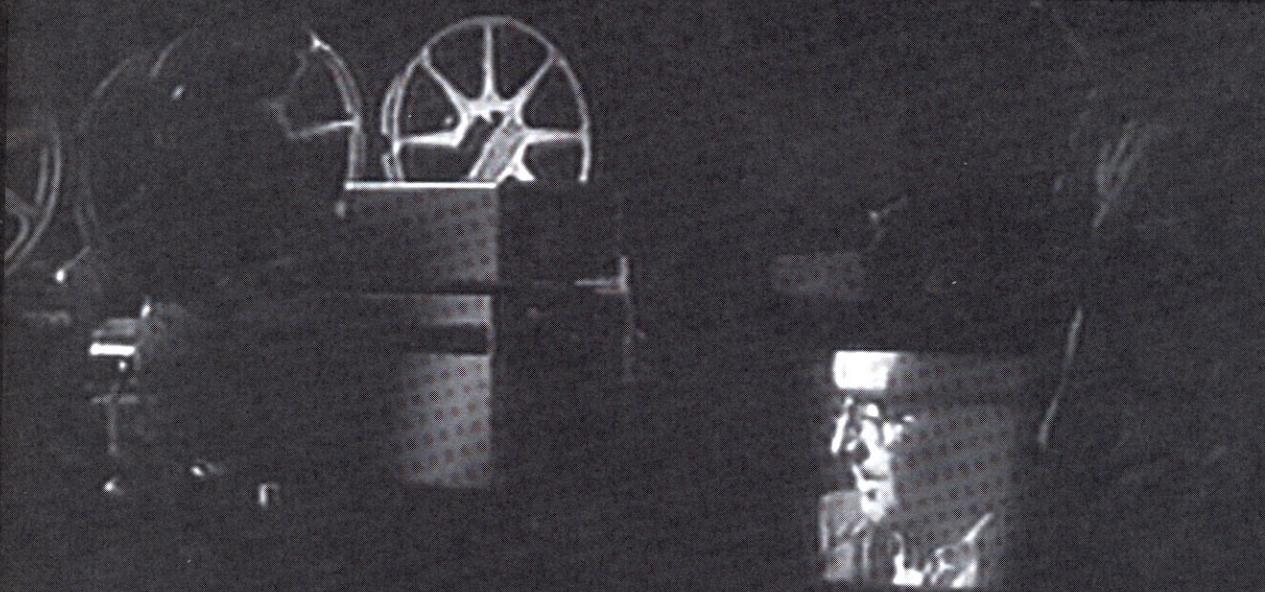
Godard's value, however, has always resided more in his originality than in the assumed correctness of his ideological position. His contestations are more epistemological than political. Even the Dziga-Vertov films are troubled by a problem of tone.

In *One Plus One* (1968), are the Black Panthers sympathetically presented or are they ridiculed? In *Tout va bien* (1972), if Godard and

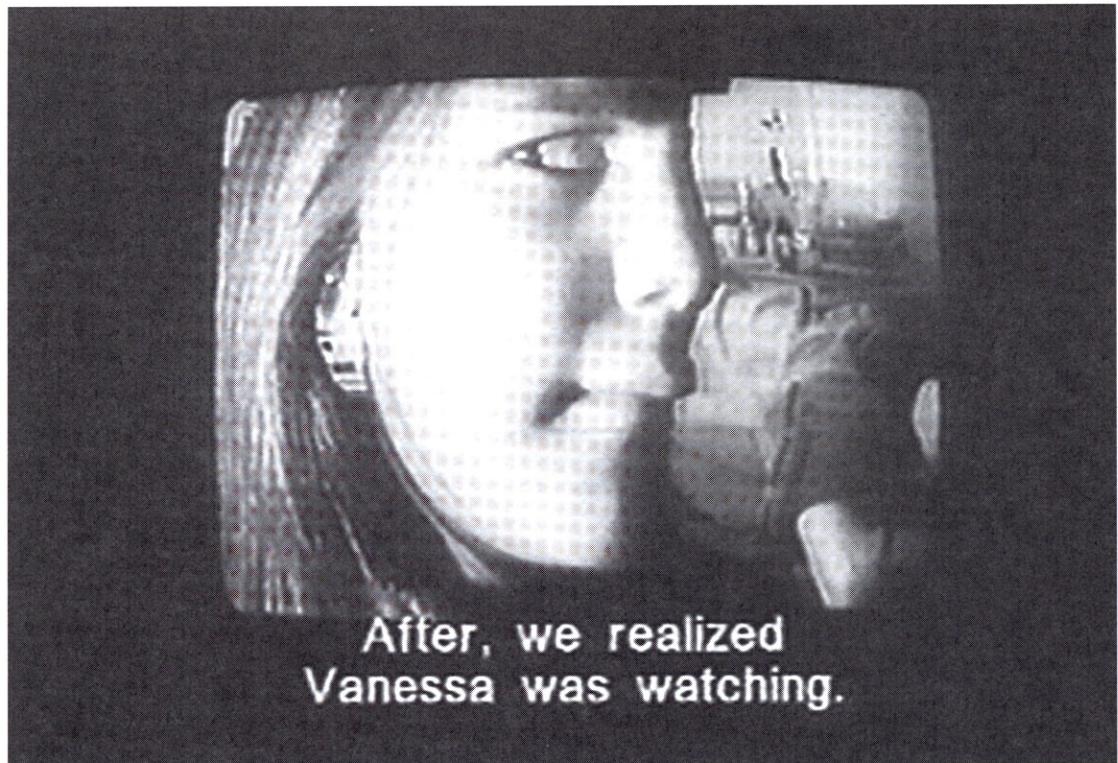
Top: Nicholas and Vanessa in *Numéro Deux*
Bottom: Jeannot in his factory in *Numéro Deux*



There was a factory
and we put a landscape around it.

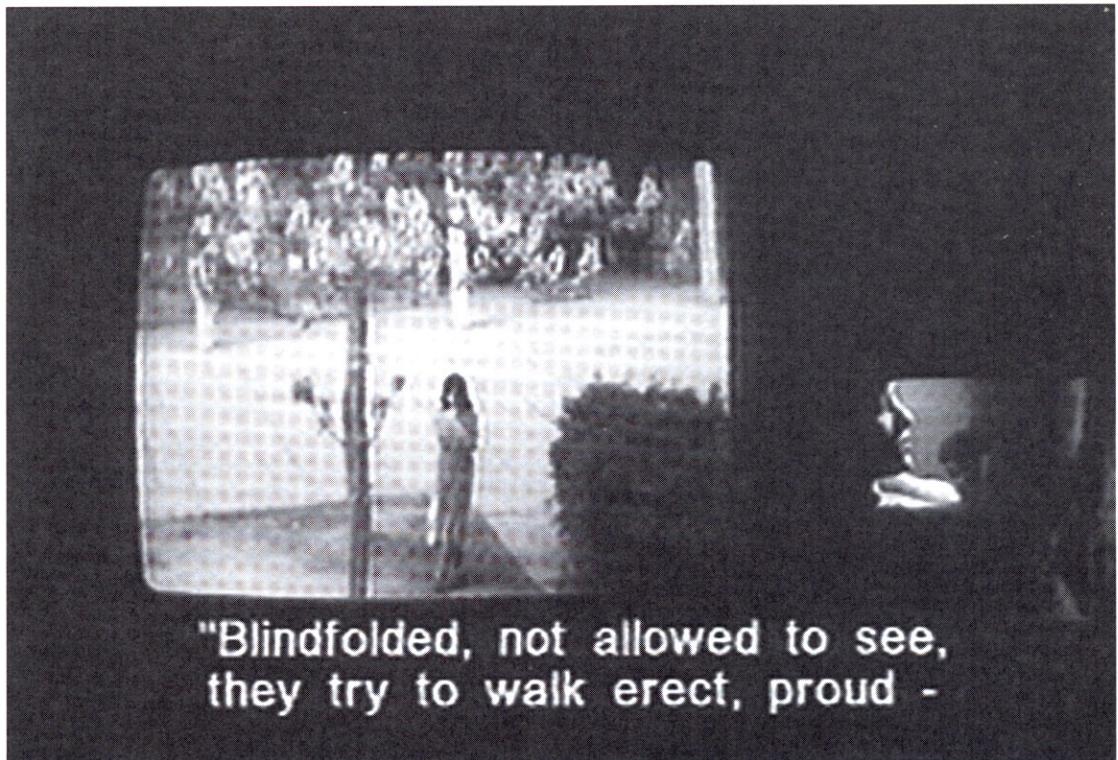


My hand is a machine
that directs another machine.



After, we realized
Vanessa was watching.

Extended superimposition in *Numéro Deux*



\"Blindfolded, not allowed to see,
they try to walk erect, proud -

Woman's work in *Numéro Deux*

Gorin wanted to present people caught up in their own rhetoric,¹ aren't all the characters equally victims of this phenomenon of language, the workers as well as the boss — including the stars, Jane Fonda and Yves Montand?

When Godard returned to the theatres with *Sauve qui peut (la vie)*, the tone was so different that even staunch admirers didn't know what to make of the film. It was alarmingly lyrical; it seemed autobiographical; there were disquieting suggestions of anality; and there was a sexual orgy towards the end which, while implicitly analogous to the process of film production, was hard to understand.

Before this film, however, there had been *Numéro Deux* (1975). A scarcely-known masterpiece, it is crucial in the establishment of "le nouveau Godard" in terms both of its structure and its politics.

.....

Numéro Deux is pivotal because it represents a synthesis of Godard's televisual and his cinematic practice. After a serious traffic accident in the early 1970s, after Godard met Anne-Marie Miéville and left Paris for, first Grenoble in the south of France and then Rolle in his native Switzerland, he began to work with video.

Video has been important for Godard because, during his exile from cinema, it has allowed him to work for television while the immediacy of video demystified the role of cameraperson, increasing his sense of artistic control.² Furthermore, the conventions of video editing encouraged him to work with images in a different way.

Except for an isolated example in *À bout de souffle* (1959), there are no dissolves in Godard. By facilitating dissolves and superimpositions, however, video technology allowed him to work with two images at a time. As he recently explained:

On video, I love doing superimpositions, real superimpositions, almost as in music, where movements mix — sometimes slowly, sometimes brutally — then something happens. You can have two images at the same time, much like you can have two ideas at the same time, and you can commute between the two, which, to me, seems very close to childhood.³

In his battles with the linearity of standard Hollywood cinema, video has assisted him in arresting narrative's dependence on causality. In *Numéro Deux* Godard asks: "Why always 'Once upon a time'? Why not 'Twice upon a time — *il y avait deux fois*?' Why not a polyphonic narrative operating simultaneously on two different levels? As with puns and citations, why not create sounds and images that are intrinsically polysemic, the meanings of which migrate into one another, transforming one another, as the intertitles do in *Numéro Deux*?

Numéro Deux is also important because, in ways more complex than either *Lotte in Italia* (1969) or *Tout va bien* (1972), it registers a shift from the partisan politics of society to the sexual politics of the family. It is the only film in which Godard approaches this subject so nakedly and, being the first feature he made with Anne-Marie Miéville, it is the

beginning of his mature recognition of the feminine.

Lacking the space to address these issues thoroughly, I will content myself with two or three things.

First of all, there is the family, suggesting both ruptures and continuities. All the adults suffer from different forms of oppression, the women more than the men; and while the children remain curious, they are uncertain of their place in the world or of the world in them.

"There was a landscape and we put a factory in it," Nicholas declares at the opening of the film; to which his sister replies: "There was a factory and we put a landscape around it." This concern with origin, with sequence, with finding the right point of entry into the world is central to this film as it is to many others in recent Godard.

What came first within consciousness, nature or culture? Where did civilization come from? What if, as the exiled Czechoslovakian professor suggests in *Je vous salue, Marie* (1985), existence fell from the sky?⁴

These questions clarify, at least in part, the anality of the film. Whatever explanation might derive from Godard's own life, metaphorically, anality addresses the need to find the right entry, the appropriate way of penetrating the mysteries of the Other. More viscerally in this film, anality is linked to incapacity, whether constipation or impotence, as (especially in *Prénom Carmen* [1983]) shit is related to money — to that supreme cultural product that capitalist societies excrete into the world.

This line of thought must be developed in another essay; but in this film, "number two" takes on a multiplicity of meanings. It is, as the producer once explained, Godard's second first feature.⁵ It is also a film that has two images instead of one. Furthermore, as Kaja Silverman has suggested,⁶ it is about man and woman where, because woman is number two, she feels like shit.⁷

The presence of two images allows Godard to offer two stories simultaneously or two versions of the same story. At one moment, as Sandrine is seen in the courtyard talking to a neighbour about the oppression of women in Chile, on a little screen to the right we see her exploring the possibilities of fellatio. At another moment, as the grandmother declaims the need to achieve greater liberation for women, we see her on another screen engaged in the silenced servitude of household tasks.

Finally, in a way that recapitulates his narrating voice in

1 As Jean-Pierre Gorin explained when introducing the film at York University in Toronto in 1974.

2 During a visit to Concordia University in Montreal in 1974, Godard explained that, prior to the immediacy of the video image, the cameraman exercised the role of witch-doctor in a primitive village, predicting what would happen with the rushes the next day!

3 From an interview at the Montreal Film Festival, August 1995. See <<http://www.filmscouts.com/festivals/montreal/hbmoi.html>>.

4 See "Metaphysical Cinema: two recent films by Jean-Luc Godard," by Peter Harcourt *CineAction* No. 11 (Winter 1987-88), pp.2-10.

5 Georges de Beauregard, during a personal interview in Paris in 1975.

6 "In Her Place" in *Speaking About Godard*, by Kaja Silverman and Harun Farocki (New York University Press, 1998), pp.141-169.

7 In French, these terms seem less scatological. If *merde* is the word for shit, *emmendée* might mean "put upon" or "screwed up" and *emmerdeuse* generally means "bitch" — both words used by Sandrine about herself in this film.



Goya's "The Parasol" walks by his "The Nude Maya" in *Passion*

Deux ou trois choses que je sais d'elle (1966), in *Numéro Deux*, Godard presents himself as in charge of the operation yet powerless to resolve the issues he confronts.

The film begins with a colour image of Godard in his studio, his factory, his printing press (as he explains), but a printing press in which images are produced. Situated at the right of the screen, we see his body with his hands that program the machines. But his head is cut off by the top of the screen. The head that programs the hands appears on a black-&-white monitor to his right, fragmented from his body.

Similarly at the end, after this painful examination of the intimacies of a working-class family in the south of France, we see Godard slumped over his mixing console, two empty video screens fluttering beside him to his right. For a moment, Sandrine Battistella steps out of her role as actress to comment on her part. "Suddenly, it's over," she says. She even seems to accuse Godard for the way he has used her. "Letting others tell you news about yourself is a crime — especially if you don't get paid for it."

When images appear on the monitors from different sections in the film, Godard looks up, as if they are distant from himself. Voices are heard, along with bird sounds, and then some music, while we see Godard's hands manipulating the wafer-switches on his console. A male voice offers us a poem which goes something like:

These eyes look at you night and day,
Not just at numbers and hatred, as they say

These forbidden things that you're creeping towards ...
Which will be yours when you close the eyes ...
Of oppression.

Meanwhile, Godard has closed the lid on his mixing console, leaving birds and music on the sound-track to finish the film — nature and culture.

The tape stops. The screen darkens. Timpani quietly sound a perfect cadence over black and, along with the birds, we hear a concluding chord on the strings.

It is as if there can be only an aesthetic resolution to all the problems that the film has examined, as if only the orderings of art can make the pain of life endurable.

....

In recent years, "passion" has been a growing concern for Godard. But what is passion? What are the meanings that he has evolved for it?

In *Sauve qui peut*, the word kept recurring. One character would use it and another would reply: "No, that's not passion."⁸ If that film refused to define the term, this refusal is, understandably, less true of *Passion* (1982). With this film, the semantic thrust of the word begins to come clear.

The film continues Godard's battles with narrative. If *Numéro Deux* is full of stories but with no plot to thicken, so is *Passion*. But this time the stories occur more vertically than horizontally, more synchronically than diachronically. *Passion* is a film that narrates itself through paintings.

By working with paintings, Godard is challenging the

temporal flow of filmic narratives. As Glen Norton has suggested: "...painting would seem to give primacy to the image as narrative, while film gives primacy to the narrative as image."⁹ But the joke in this film (and Godard can be a *very funny* filmmaker) is that the paintings are narrative paintings. They all tell stories.

"Una storia! Una storia! I need a story," the Italian producer cries out, unaware that there are stories all around him. Early in the film, when discussing the lighting of the first *tableau vivant*, Rembrandt's "The Night Watch," a male voice asks: "Que-ce que c'est, cette histoire?"

"What kind of story is this?" that might literally mean; but more colloquially: "What's going on here? What's happening?" Although not obvious to the characters, the answer for spectators is very rich indeed.

The film opens on a Rubenesque sky, the camera unsteadily tracing the wake of an aircraft in the distance.¹⁰ The next shot is of Isabelle (Huppert) in her factory, pushing a cart. Right away, we have established one of the thematic dyads that will inform this film — the celestial and terrestrial, the supernal and the everyday. Then we have shots of the sky again and of the Rembrandt *tableau* and of the director, Jerzy (Radziwilowicz), arguing with his cameraman about the quality of light; and then shots of other characters before an additional shot of Isabelle, this time at a drill. "My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" she murmurs — a moment that, while comically pretentious, points the way towards the meaning of "passion" in this film.

In its root sense, passion entails pain. Whether working with machines in a factory or machines in a film studio, there is agony involved. The equivalence established between these two sites of suffering is confirmed by the music. The same Ravel concerto that elevates one elevates the other — not without the possibility of ironies involved.

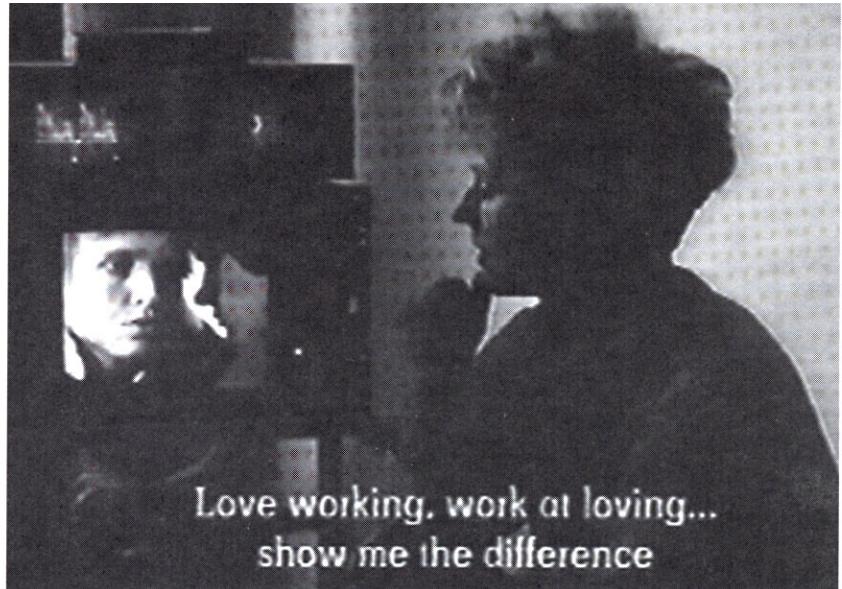
If the demands of work and those of love seem at odds with one another, equivalences are also established. At one point Jerzy exclaims: "Work is like pleasure: it has the same gestures as love." And if industry and nature are equally at odds, they too are collapsed into one another by Michel (Piccoli)'s insistent smoker's hack surrealistically linked to a rose between his teeth!

If there is a concern throughout the *tableaux* with lighting, there is a similar concern among the work-

8 See "La passion, ce n'est pas ça," by Elizabeth Lyon *Jean-Luc Godard: Son + Image, 1974-1991*, ed. by Raymond Bellour, with Mary Lea Bandy. (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1992), pp.43-44.

9 Godard's *Passion*, by Glen Norton <<http://www.geocities.com/Hollywood/Cinema/4355/passion.html>>.

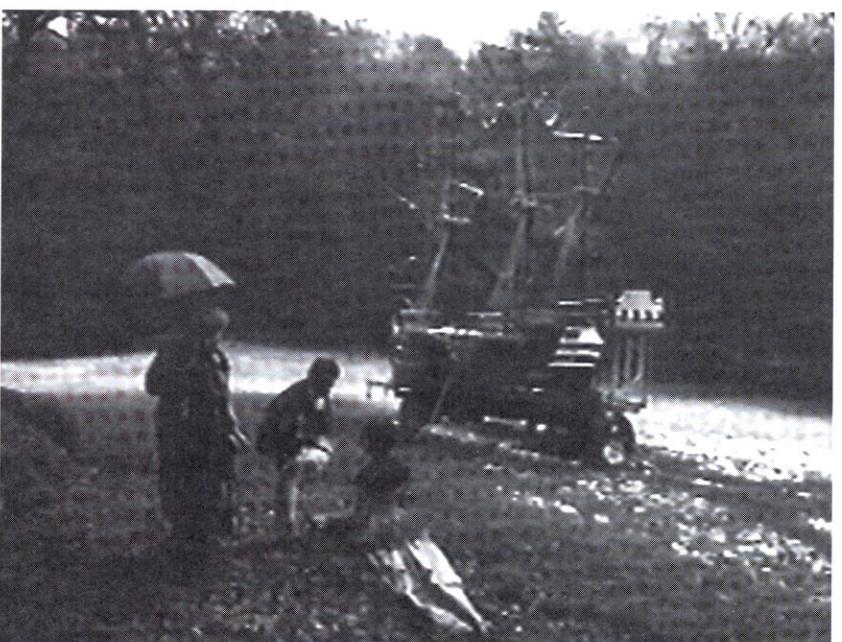
10 This sequence, evidently, was shot by Godard himself *Speaking About Godard*, p.171.



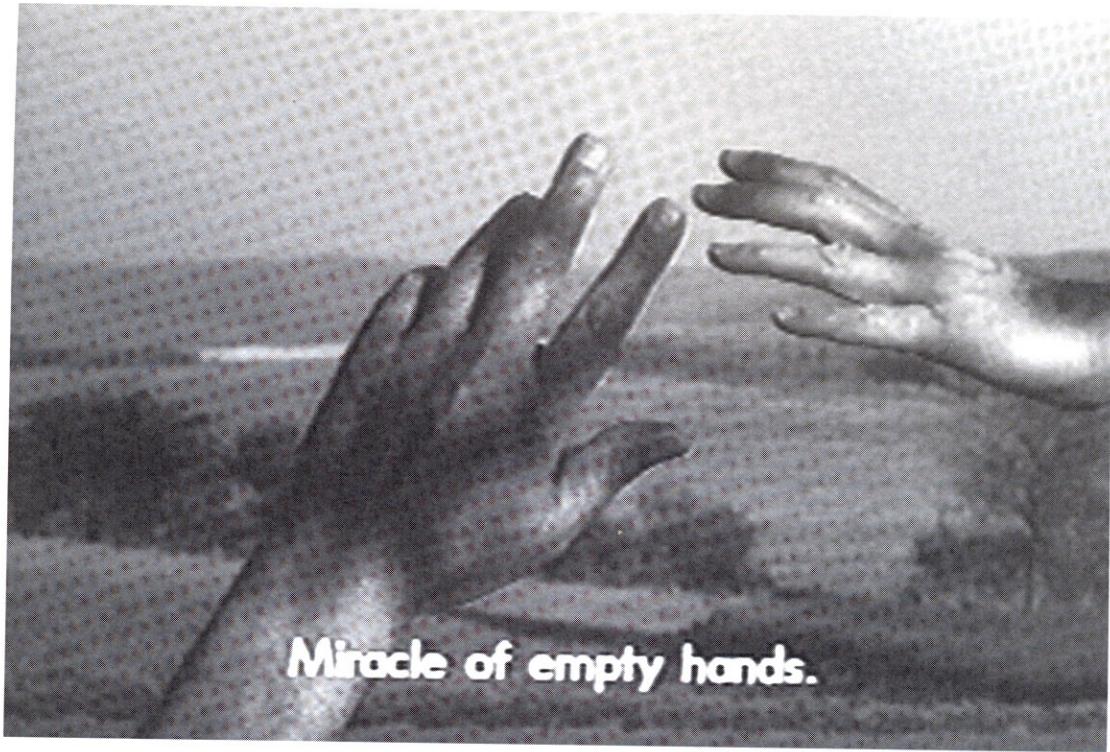
Hanna Schygulla (with Jerzy) in *Passion*



Above: Delacroix recreated in *Passion*



Imaginary ship of flight in *Passion*



Miracle of empty hands.

The miracle of empty hands in *Nouvelle Vague*

ers. When they meet in the evening, there is only a single light. As Isabelle manoeuvres it one way and then another, it sometimes reveals, sometimes conceals her freckles — as a director of photography would be able to do.

In this scene as elsewhere in the film, there is uncertain synch, suggesting a larger collectivity than the faces we see in the room. And like one of the workers in *Tout va bien*, Isabelle has a stutter. She also plays a harmonica. As a worker, she too has access to the production of art — but with a severely limited range.

This is how the film works, simultaneously comic and disturbing — confronting contradiction yet suggesting resemblance. In simpler ways, this is how Godard's cinema has always worked. A dyad is proposed — a binary opposition that establishes difference; and then something else occurs, sometimes through the music, that folds this difference back towards similarity.

This rhetorical device is at the centre of the unequal struggle between male and female, and it exists as well at the centre of paradox. In Godard, these struggling dyads are the source both of his humour and his passion.

Early in *Passion*, speaking about the paintings, a female voice states what is, arguably, Godard's artistic credo:

It's not a lie. It's something imaginary. Never exactly the truth, but not the opposite either. It's something separated from the real world by calculated approximations of probabilities.

This is Sophie (Loucachevsky) speaking, the assistant to the director; but that doesn't matter. The fact that, as in other

films by Godard, so many voices are insecurely attached to the personages they spring from serves to generalize them beyond the dramatic role they play in the film.

"Why must there always be a story?" Jerzy asks. Causal narrative is a form that Godard has always eschewed — perhaps at the outset because he couldn't manage it but later because of the way he views the world.

The mature Godard views not just capitalism as iniquitous but taylorism — that terrifying way of thinking that pits efficiency against inventiveness, against the creative imagination.¹¹ An insistence on story is, then, an insistence on the efficiencies of instrumental reason, of the kind of linear narrativity that David Bordwell celebrates as "classical" — as the "taylorized" norm for cinematic practice.¹²

Neither people nor artworks behave in this way. We need to walk around one another, move back and forth with one another and within those works that we are really engaged by, as Godard's camera enables us to explore in a three dimensional way the two dimensional paintings that *Passion* takes such pains to recreate; or, in the case of the Goya sequence, allows the characters in one painting to stroll past those in another.¹³

At one point, when Jerzy and Hanna (Schygulla) are talking together, in a complex scene involving her image doubled on a television screen, she complains about language. As a German, she doesn't know how to talk to Jerzy, a Pole, while they are both speaking French. She doesn't feel up to it.

More recusant than Hanna, Jerzy suggests that "if the sentence isn't formed, you can begin to speak, begin to live." You are not held back by another person's syntax. You are less spoken for than you can speak for yourself. Surely, in late

Godard, this belief still represents a revolutionary position, inviting us thoroughly to rethink the epistemological priorities of the world?

The ending of *Passion* involves a concatenation of disparate imaginative spaces. If within Faure's *Requiem* we had listened to the "Agnus Dei", the words of which Isabelle also recited while awaiting her defloration; we now see actual lambs gambolling about a field! If everyone is dispersing, if both the film and Hanna's hotel have been abandoned, we also see in the field what looks like the ship from Werner Herzog's *Nosferatu* (1979), its red sails furled, suggesting further imaginary journeys. And if everyone is going to Poland — at that time, through the Solidarity movement, the site of optimistic collective struggle — Manuelle (Baltazar), the dancer/servant, demurs since, living the yogic life, she hates cars.

She finally consents to ride with Jerzy because, through the power of his imagination, he persuades her that his car is a magic carpet — *un tapis volant*. She prefers the imaginary over the rational, which spectators must also do to appreciate this film!

Like *Numéro Deux*, *Passion* ends with nothing resolved but with an aesthetic sleight of hand comparable both in its implausibility and its playfulness to that which terminates *Détective* (1985). *Passion* is one of the most accomplished achievements of Godard's late period, rivalled only by the even more extraordinary achievement of *Nouvelle Vague* (1990).

.....

Anyone approaching the cinematic works of Jean-Luc Godard encounters an ever-changing kaleidoscope of apparently inconstruable patterns. The semantic and affective potential of his work exceeds the analytical possibilities of language. In retrospect, Godard's cinema has always functioned in this manner, although with more familiar generic cues to help us find our way.

With their poster perspectives and primary colours, films like *Deux ou trois choses* and *Made in USA* (1968) possessed a *pictographic* simplicity. In their organization, they were as much films of reference as of representation. The citations contribute to this characteristic. In Godard's work, texts speak to other texts from a multiplicity of enunciatory spaces. While a drama is unfolding — some little love story such as we find in *À bout de souffle* or *Pierrot le fou* (1965) — entire cultures are adduced, enriching (if we pick up on them) the affective power of the story.¹⁴

Similarly, there has been a *stenographic* economy in his use of sound. Whether for reasons of finance or of aesthetic preference, a street scene in which we see many cars and a number of people is registered on the sound-track by the swoosh of a single vehicle or the click-clop of one pair of human heels.

Creating different effects in different films, collectively this stenographic economy separates the signifying elements of cinema. It frees them from the primacy of their representational value, allowing them to function like the brush-strokes of a painting — indeed, like cinematic signs. In ways that have been reductively described as Brechtian,¹⁵ this styl-

istic economy challenges the cohesion of cinematic illusion, inviting the intervention of the mind.

Although *Nouvelle Vague* has more of a story than many recent films by Godard, it is his most rigorously *composed*. It is his most insistently citational. With texts drawn from William Faulkner, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Baudelaire, Jacques Chardonne, Rimbaud, Dante, Dostoevsky, Howard Hawks, and innumerable other sources, everything in the film comes from somewhere else.

Since *Passion*, moreover, Godard's fondness for citation

11 Frederick Winslow Taylor (1856–1915), the CD ROM of *The Canadian Encyclopedia* informs us, "was the father of scientific management" His work has led to the dispiriting efficiencies of McDonald's and of the Hollywood production system.

12 See "Classical Narration: The Hollywood Example," in *Narrative in the Fiction Film*, by David Bordwell (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), pp156–204.

13 See "Moving Pictures" in *Speaking About Godard*, 170–196

14 For an example of some of the work that has been done on the literary references, see "The Declension" by Jean-Louis Leutrat in *Jean-Luc Godard, Son + Image, 1974–1991*, pp23–33. For my own examination of Godard's use of Shakespeare, see "Godard" in *Brick: A Literary Journal*, No 53 (Winter 1996), pp.52–58.

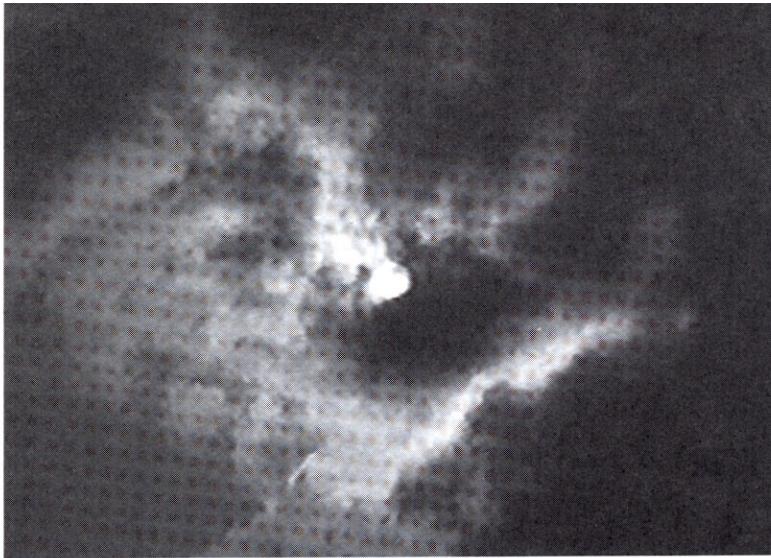
15 For a restoration of the actual value of Brecht, see "The Logic and Legacy of Brechtianism," by Murray Smith. *Post Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies*, ed. by David Bordwell and Noël Carroll (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), pp.130–148.

Light beyond the trees in *Nouvelle Vague*



Domiziana Giordano as the Countess in *Nouvelle Vague*





Rubenesque sky in *Nouvelle Vague*



The Countess and Roger Lennox with horse in *Nouvelle Vague*



The philosophical gardener in *Nouvelle Vague*

has embraced music as well. In the past, there was a mixture of "composed" and "appropriated" music;¹⁶ but for *Nouvelle Vague*, he draws upon musicians as diverse as Dino Saluzzi, David Darling, Patti Smith, Paolo Conte, Meredith Monk, Paul Hindemith, and Arnold Schoenberg.¹⁷ Furthermore, Godard's use of stereo is exemplary, establishing different units of sound in the separate channels, frequently — especially in *King Lear* (1987) — in conflict with one another.

Godard has often claimed that he *invents* nothing. As Jerzy, his surrogate in *Passion*, explains to his assistant: "I do nothing, Sophie, nothing at all. I observe, I transform, I transfer, I smooth the rough edges." During the press conference at Cannes, Godard even suggested that *Nouvelle Vague* could be considered a silent film, because none of the words in it are his own!¹⁸ As a further gesture of artistic humility, he withholds his name from the credits of the film.

Far from being silent, however, *Nouvelle Vague* engulfs us like a symphony. It represents a new cinematic invention — *un film concret*. Thinking along parallel lines, Claire Bartoli, who is blind, has described the soundscape of the film:

Godard dislodges the sounds of the world, fashions them, isolates them from the life peculiar to them: a bark, a strain of music, a few words by a writer, the ring of a bell, the sound of waves returns to them their peculiarity; playing their significant roles of intervention, rupture, tragedy and mystery they become events. The emotion is engendered by the very substance of the sound.¹⁹

Godard's characters are also events. They tell their own stories. Like Michel Piccoli and Hanna Schygulla in *Passion*, in *Nouvelle Vague* Alain Delon is himself a citation, educed from former films.

And yet, even though the dominant mode of the film is declamatory, *Nouvelle Vague* has the narrative authority of a nineteenth-century novel. Thierry Jouisse has suggested that it appears to utilize the classical convention of the *passé simple*.²⁰ If Delon incarnates the two Lennox brothers, Roger and Richard (who are actually the same character), he also narrates the film, as if in the past tense.

"I wanted this to be a narrative," he says at the opening; while towards the end, he moralizes the upshot of the characters' experience, as a novelist might do:

It was as if they had already lived all this. Their words seemed frozen in the traces of other words from other times. They paid no heed to what they did but to the difference which set today's acts in the present and parallel acts in the past. They felt tall, motionless, above them past and present — identical waves in the same ocean.²¹

The film less evokes a past than moments that are timeless, endlessly passing away and then recurring — like Lennox himself managed to do.

"A garden is never finished," the gardener (Roland Amstutz) at one point recites, "It's like prose." In this prose-poem by Godard, the eternity of nature is placed in vibrant

contrast to all the investors and bankers who inhabit the story. In this way, the film has to do with scale.

In *Je vous sauve, Marie*, during the break-up of the professor with his student, when Eva cries out that the world is too sad, he replies philosophically: "No. It's large."

Similarly, in *Nouvelle Vague*, twice in the film, each time over shots of nature, a voice announces what might be taken as the moral of the film:

We can take as defunct the society we're living in. Future ages will recall it only as a charming moment in history. They'll say "It was a time when there were rich and poor, fortresses to take, heights to scale, treasures well enough guarded to preserve their appeal. Luck was in the running..."

If *Passion* is about light, *Nouvelle Vague* is about time. It is about waves ever returning — and the gift of empty hands. Indeed, the outstretched hand is the recurring visual motif in the film.

Nouvelle Vague is Godard's most accomplished love story. Set within the natural world, as Silverman and Farocki have suggested,²² it is the natural world to which the characters aspire — to be at one with the cyclical rhythms of nature, mute in their magnificence, like the horses ever-present beside the cars.

In terms of the love story, the "drownings" seem like taking the plunge. With echoes both of Murnau's *Sunrise* (1927) and the Gene Tierney vehicle, *Leave Her To Heaven* (1945), they are also a baptism. They are part of the renewal necessary to be able to love.

The outstretched hand is both a plea and an offering. "Giving a hand is all I ask of joy," Lennox cites his mother twice in the film. The gift of empty hands is Godard's image for human love — the woman towards the man, the man towards the woman, even if they have nothing to give.

This position is not sentimental. There is still a struggle for equality within the sexes, a constant battle for control. If the Countess (Domiziano Giordano) ties his shoes at the end, he offers her his hand; if she declares she will drive, we see Lennox at the wheel as they set off together, disappearing behind the trees, assisted by the concluding strains of Dino Saluzzi's accordion.

There is no aesthetic sleight of hand necessary to end this film. Issues have been confronted and resolved — if not on the political at least on the personal level. The Countess appears to be giving away her property. They are leaving the estate that was full of those recreant lawyers and CEO's and moving towards some other kind of life. For this most unconventional film, Godard has devised a conventional happy ending.

.....

Godard's return to theatrical filmmaking has been marked by his return to Switzerland, by a more profound recognition of the feminine, and by his surrender to the beauty of the image — something he had literally tried to erase during his Dziga-Vertov period — as if to deny pleasure to illuded eyes! Not only does this acceptance of the image suggest that Godard

now puts as high a value on feeling as on rational thought but it has enabled him to work like a composer, creating film works that are to a large degree independent of their representations. It has also led to an abundance of what I like to call "wow" moments in his work — moments of epiphany, *compacted* moments that fuse the referential and the aesthetic. These compacted moments make us aware of the extraordinary achievement of the artefact — like the poetry of Mallarmé or the intricacies of music.

For all their playfulness and outstanding inventiveness, the late films are, however, mournful in tone. They seem like products of a civilization that is coming to the end. With its Latin intertitles, *Nouvelle Vague* is like a mass. "Incipit Lamentatio" announces the liturgy that follows and "Consumatum Est" brings it to a close — not without soliciting a smile at the wonder of its own inventiveness.

Although a politics remains in the late films of Godard, there is also the recurring need for terrestrial transcendence. Hence all those Rubenesque skies and, in *Nouvelle Vague*, a concern with the light beyond the trees.

Throughout this film, the long-shots are framed by the shade of abundant trees, emphasizing not only the depth of the image and the smallness of the characters but also the sense of illumination perceptible through darkness. Meanwhile, continual tracking shots make connections between fragments: they link the trees with the house, the horses with the cars, the businessmen with the servants. Stylistically, the film strives for unity — for reconciliation with the contumely of the world.

Tragically funny, hilariously sad, the films of Jean-Luc Godard gain their power from his unflagging attempts to make sense of existence. From their early energetic playfulness, they have evolved into serious philosophical acknowledgments of "universal mutation" and of "the vanity of life" in ways that Santayana would have admired. In their combination of the throw-away and the considered, all his films register these tensions. They depict both the playfulness of life (as in tennis) and its painful seriousness (as in passion) — the ludic and the agonistic.

"What I want," he once said back in the 1960s, "is to capture the definitive by chance." I think he has.

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16 "Film Music and Narrative Agency," by Jerrold Levinson. *Post Theory*, (pp.258-283).

17 The sources of the music for *Nouvelle Vague* are identified both in the published script and in the liner notes of the CD ROM version of the sound-track for this film. See below.

18 In *Cahiers du Cinéma* 433 (Juin 90), p10.

19 "Interior View: Jean-Luc Godard's *Nouvelle Vague*", trans by John M. King. Initially published in *Trafic* 19 (Paris), this essay is included in the liner notes for the CD ROM version of the sound-track of the film. (ECM 1600/01), pp.69-94.

20 "La Splendeur dans l'herbe" *Cahiers du Cinéma* 433, p.8

21 A detailed script for the film can be found in *l'Avant-scène du Cinéma* 396/397 (Novembre/Décembre 1990), pp2-135

22 "The Same, Yet Other" in *Speaking About Godard*, pp197-227

Pre '59 New Wave

Polyphony and Paradigms

by **Julien Lapointe**

Critical commentary of the New Wave tends to take the transition from criticism to directing for granted. There are exceptional cases where the criticism is read as a possible foreshadowing to the ensuing directorial careers. But even here, as shall be shown, the elaborated critique is ultimately limited and cursory. Most commentary prefers to make (or imply) a division of the two. The films of the New Wave are studied with only occasional allusion to the criticism which preceded it. Hardly ever is the allowed hindsight considered, which allows to understand how the criticism is crucially linked to the filmmaking. As we shall see, such connections easily transcend the more obvious one, often perceived: that the New Wave preached the "*politique des auteurs*," only later to practise it.

The purpose of this paper is to consider the connections between the criticism of the five *Cahiers* critics¹, who would later form what has been termed the New Wave (Chabrol, Godard, Rivette, Rohmer, Truffaut), and their subsequent films, with particular emphasis on Godard and Truffaut. This latter choice is not arbitrary. For I also, conclusively, wish to elucidate the varied quality of directorial work, from one director to the other. Whereas Truffaut and Godard possess particularly inventive and ceaselessly polyphonic approaches to the film medium, Rohmer's and Chabrol's filmic styles exemplify the refinement of a particular tone, which is more contained. In terms of aesthetic sensibility and innovation, the former are arguably on a higher plane than the latter (Rivette is a case all to his own, which shall be dealt with later). This point shall be returned to. It shall

¹ Of course this is misleading. The New Wave didn't launch *Les Cahiers* but, according to Rohmer, in an interview with Jean Narboni, more or less asserted a dominant editorial control of its content, roughly two years posterior to its inception. Suffice to add that the so-called *Cahiers* critics wrote elsewhere — significantly in *Arts*, where Truffaut occupied a column — though the *Cahiers* remained something of an HQ, so to speak. Needless to say, critical commentary in this essay also focuses on the writings published elsewhere than in the *Cahiers*.

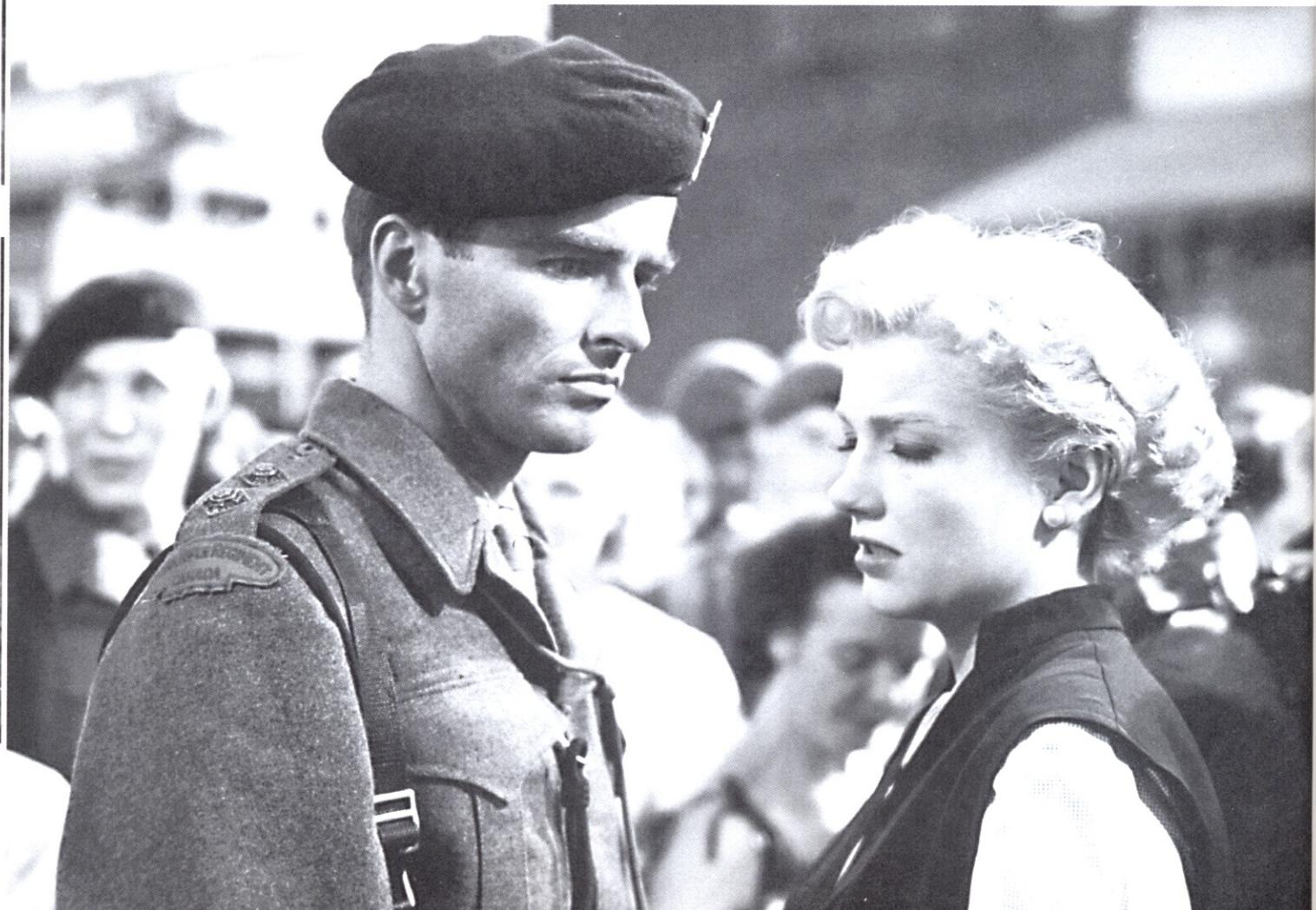


Godard's *Breathless*



Hitchcock's *Strangers on a Train*, 1951

Hitchcock's *I Confess*, 1953



therefore be a suggested contention of this paper that there are variances of quality between Truffaut, Godard, Chabrol and Rohmer, part of which can be explained when analysing their 50s criticism.

Certain qualifications are necessary to be made for Chabrol. It may indeed seem misleading to speak of a "filmic style" and "particular tone" with regards to Chabrol: although there *does* exist a discernible consistency in style and tone, he has, during the course of some fifty films, diversified the subject matter of his work to a remarkable degree. One can say that in the past ten years, he has shown a consistent interest in the subject of women, afflicted by various forms of social entrapment (*Une affaire de femmes*, '88; *Madame Bovary*, '91; *Betty*, '92; *L'enfer*, '94; *La cérémonie*, '95). Though this does not acknowledge the remarkable dramatic differences of those films, nor the presence, within those years, of films centred on male subjects (the Henry Miller adaptation *Jours tranquilles à Clichy*, the documentary *L'œil de Vichy*; even *L'enfer* features a central male character, though the female character is significant to its central drama and social critique). As well, the above qualification is applicable to *Violette Nozière*, released ten years prior to *Une affaire de femmes*: the topic of the socially circumscribed female is not a recently found interest for Chabrol.

Nonetheless, one can argue that there exists a general critical consensus, at least as exemplified for example in the contemporary pages of *Les cahiers du cinéma*, concerning what is considered to be Chabrol's best work: *La femme infidèle*, *Le boucher*, *Violette Nozière*, *Une affaire de femmes*, *Betty*, *La cérémonie* figure prominently on such a list. On the basis of this, one can speak of a "Chabrolian aesthetic": an interest in socially contextual tragic narratives, with an often morbid and ironic tone, and an underlying moral attitude that is often ambivalent and at times ambiguous. Formally, such films embrace a classical *mise en scène*: rigorously formal camera set-ups, in which the succeeding shots obey a Hitchcockian characteristic to endow the film with an austere, monologic but frequently elusive meaning.

Before continuing, I turn to the case of Jacques Rivette. David Thomson has contended that "Rivette is the most important filmmaker of the past thirty-five years."² Though on arguably Rivette's most widely known work, Thomson has this to say: "[*La religieuse*] may be the Rivette film that most people have seen, but it is the least interesting and characteristic because it conforms to so many normal procedures [...] The film is professionally appealing, no matter the human ugliness of its subject. Indeed, *La religieuse* was made for the art-house audience it shocked in France, and rather bored elsewhere. All of which has little to do with Rivette's significance."

Rivette made no films between *Paris nous appartient* (1960) and *La religieuse* (1965). *Paris nous appartient* took over two years to complete. Subsequent to the Diderot adaptation, Rivette's work includes *L'amour fou* (1968), the thirteen hour serial *Out One* (1971), *Céline et Julie vont en bateau* (1974), and a several other pictures made with some regularity. More recently there has been the more widely seen *La belle*

noiseuse, aired on the Canadian arts channel Bravo!, the six hour Jeanne d'Arc biography, with the reputed Sandrine Bonnaire and *Haut bas fragile*. Public and critical recognition, what comparatively little he does have (in North America especially), has been long to receive and hard won. In such a light, to omit Rivette from further critical commentary may seem either ignorant or mean-spirited, if not just plain wrong. Unfortunately, Rivette poses a problem for the context of this essay. His lack of financial resources presumably stunted the development of his early directorial career (i.e. the first ten years) and these gaps complicate any effort to apply a rigorous critique based on Rivette's developed sense of aestheticism. With few films over a long period, concrete and definitive connections between them and his previous criticism grow obscure. Between the fifties and *L'Amour fou*, Rivette may have changed, as an aesthetician, a long way, and without a consistent career to support a continuity throughout this change, points of liaison with the fifties may only risk to grow obscure.

The omission is regrettable, perhaps unfair for a filmmaker (to say nothing of Rivette the critic!) already so obscure in North America. But to do otherwise would be inconsistent with the orientation of this essay.

Truffaut; + Truffaut's Hitchcock vs Chabrol's and Rohmer's Hitchcock

The films of François Truffaut have provided a ceaseless occasion for criticism, commentary. Interest with Truffaut's *œuvre* continues to abound, but his criticism is rarely looked upon with comparable scrutiny. One exception is Wheeler Winston Dixon, in his book (published 1993) *The Early Film Criticism of François Truffaut*. As Dixon explains early on, the English translations of Truffaut's criticism rather selectively conform to the "Sarrisian cannon", and even Truffaut's own *Les films de ma vie* (1975) offers a rather archetypal perspective on his alleged cinematic interests. Truffaut (the critic) is best remembered for two works: the polemical essay "Une certaine tendance du cinéma français", published in *Les cahiers* of January '54, and his collected interviews with Alfred Hitchcock, later published as a book titled *Le cinéma selon Hitchcock*.

However, Truffaut's criticism is a creative mish-mash that stretches beyond the defining boundaries implied in a work such as *Les films de ma vie*. Even the celebratory tone referred to in accounts of "Une certaine tendance..." (see Antoine de Baecque's *Histoire d'une revue*) betrays certain of its veritable qualities. As Dixon points out, Truffaut's interests include not just the A list Hollywood auteurs, but equally a whole scope of B films. He had as well a particular fascination with the erotic content of certain films ("Truffaut l'érotomane", as says de Baecque). And, again as documented by de Baecque (though a regrettable omission in Dixon), he held a passing and perturbing fascination for Robert Brasillach³, revealed in

2 Thomson, *A Biographical Dictionary of Film*, 3rd ed., p. 636.

3 Well known in France, though not necessarily elsewhere, Brasillach was a talented writer, though also an anti-Semite, executed shortly after the Occupation.

a review of Brasillach's historical study of film (co-authored with Maurice Bardèche). Though perhaps Truffaut's most distinguished feature was his largely impressionistic, unargumentative and anti-theoretical writing method. I say anti-theoretical because this is what best describes Truffaut's very idiosyncratic talent. His writing approaches the film-subject with the omission of any particular, articulated vantage point; instead, he "reviews" the film, not necessarily recounting superficial judgemental impressions, but running along different lines of interpretations, taking up a point only to abandon it and pursue in a different direction.

I'm aware that the term "review" holds a negative connotation in contemporary film criticism. Among the recurring comments in praises made to Jonathan Rosenbaum is that his reviews are atypical as such: they're subjectively argued, often preresearched essays, steering away often as much from mere immediate responses to a given film. It is a standard, I think, to which most writers of film aspire. Truffaut's reviews destabilize the notion of an authoritative, coherent reading of a film. He is comparable to Manny Farber, as well as to *Cahiers* colleague Jean-Luc Godard. Only he also eschews any foregrounding of his assessments in theory, or, conversely, doesn't either seek to develop his set of assessments into a particular theory, or theoretical reading. This is where he stands apart from other *Cahiers* critics. By theory, I mean a consciously articulated analytical approach to film whose arguably objective value allows for generalization and application from film to film. Revealing examples may be found in a Rivette piece on Rossellini⁴. At one point he states: "In its energy and dash, the work of youth or early maturity remains a reflection of the movements of everyday life; animated by a different current, it is shackled to time and can detach itself only with difficulty. But the secret of *Le Carosse d'or* is that of creation and the problems, the trials, the gambles it subjects itself in order to perfect an object and give it the autonomy and the subtlety of an as yet unexplored world." That is a specific criterion, extrapolated from Renoir, for understanding film. The essay offers several other examples. Such carefully articulated readings are, with rare exception, significantly absent from Truffaut's work. (When they are present, they tend to be mundane and fundamental.) This definitive characteristic is much apparent in his early film criticism, and remains so, though less extensively, throughout the fifties, with occasional mitigating examples (e.g. an article on Chaplin's *The Great Dictator*, a cohesive, thinly veiled homage to André Bazin).

A classical example of this digressive style is his review of David Miller's movie *Sudden Fear*, entitled "Les extrêmes me touchent."⁵ The review includes a semi-anecdotal, speculative account concerning French cinema. Inserted is the following statement:

"[...] that's French cinema: three hundred linking shots end to end, one hundred times a year. If Aurenche and Bost were adapting *Le voyage au bout de la nuit* (*Journey to the End of the Night*), they would cut sentences, even words: what would remain? A few thousand suspension points; that is, rare angles, unusual lighting, cleverly cen-

tered. The notion of a shot in France has become concern for clothing, which means following a fashion. Everything happens to the right and the left, off the screen."⁶

In the immediately succeeding paragraph, Truffaut admits that this is just a preamble to his perspective of *Sudden Fear*, only the following paragraphs pursue the polemic. The piece becomes a cultural inquiry into the pervading tastes among (presumably) the French film audience, more specifically the function of humour in both French and American films (implying that his critique, although with references to Balzac and Radiguet, applies as well to American audiences, or that American films are in reality made for the French...) to alleviate an audience no longer able to suspend its disbelief, disillusioned with climactic narratives and taut emotionalism. We then jump to an extended commentary on the female star, Gloria Grahame, only to round up with five short paragraphs: on the other cast members (including Jack Palance and Joan Crawford), the general theme, the narrative location of San Francisco street, and a passing appreciation of some other aesthetic qualities (e.g. script, directorial style).

If one turns to Truffaut's celebrated interviews with Alfred Hitchcock, one can find a markedly different critical approach to cinema than that embraced by Claude Chabrol and Eric Rohmer, in their 1957 study of the director's work. Allowances for difference must be conceded with regards to the different formats of the respective works — the interview vs. the scholarly critical study — though beyond that other distinctions are discernible. The Chabrol and Rohmer study is predicated on the assumption that Hitchcock's greatness as a filmmaker has to be *explained*: it cannot be taken for granted. Moreover, the work is organized along a thesis, so that while it chronologically, much as in Truffaut's work, follows the development of Hitchcock's career, points of discussion are largely determined by the requirements of this thesis. Truffaut's style is informal, though focused; Chabrol's and Rohmer's is more rigorous and analytical. Theirs is a work of critical scholarship; Truffaut's is a non-committed analysis conducted in the form of conversation: an informed movie buff exchanging dialogue with one of his professed Masters.

There is no implied judgement in the above statement. Although Chabrol and Rohmer wrote the first book-length critical study on Alfred Hitchcock, beyond this historical significance their work is severely dated. It's no fault of the authors that two of Hitchcock's most greatly esteemed films — *Vertigo* and *Psycho* — decisive in any contemporary understanding of the director, were made following the publication of the book. This point is well made by Robin Wood and Michael Walker, though it is conversely not entirely clear, as the authors assert, that Rohmer and Chabrol are "bent on reducing [...] [Hitchcock's films] to theoretical skeletons" [*Claude Chabrol*, 8]. Chabrol and Rohmer are often limited by the critical context of their work's appearance, its ambitions and their faithful obligation to de-problematize contentious material within the Master's films.

Their study can be situated on at least three different lev-



Truffaut's *Jules and Jim*, 1961

els of intent. Firstly the work is an attempt to refute traditional critical claims (more prominent in America, at the time) that Hitchcock is little more than a clever entertainer. The authors argue that, on the contrary, the Hitchcockian universe is a consistently and profoundly moral one, whose expression marks the development of a personal and perfecting directorial style. Secondly, they wish to offer a historical perspective on Hitchcock's career, going back to his first directorial efforts, and then tracing the development of a personal vision over the course of (in 1957) forty-one films. And thirdly, there is a vaguely cultural and socio-political understanding of Hitchcock's films, an attempt to come to terms with his depiction of women, homosexuals and, as well, place his career developments within the context of the influencing commercial constraints that surround him. Ultimately the work is one of tremendous scope, yet with little room to render its dimensions justice: forty-one films compacted into a hundred and fifty pages at times makes more for a survey than a thorough, persuasive analysis.

The most jarring problem is not one of "theoretical skeletons," but relatedly of ideological blindness. Rohmer and Chabrol are unabashed in accepting (or forcing an argument for?) the "problem of homosexuality" in Hitchcock's films for example, and are unenlightened when defending his work

from claims to misogyny. Indeed, apart from their remarking that Hitchcock's more ambitious aesthetic talents have often been curbed by commercial concerns, Chabrol's and Rohmer's study most often fails when dabbling in the realm of the socio-political and the cultural. Although much of the tone of the book can be characterized as defensive and justifying (i.e. repudiating the consensus that Hitchcock can only "entertain"), in such aforementioned passages the tone becomes overt and dogmatic. The authors accept the ideological and political terms of Hitchcock's films (as they perceive them, at least), yet it is debatable to what extent this acceptance (or, once again, perception) is well-reasoned. The overall extolling of the Master's "moral universe" is sincere, but it is in these imperfections, less central to their critique, that they fail to make any room for nuance. Hence, *Spellbound* is deemed a great love story, despite its problematic (if not sexist) characterization of woman as Healer/Nurse/Mother. Chabrol and Rohmer set up, as discussion of the matter, a binary opposition between Woman as "Masculine" vs

4 Originally published as "Lettre sur Rossellini" in *Cahiers du cinéma* 46, April '55. Republished in English translation in *Cahiers du cinéma, The 1950s: Neo-Realism, Hollywood, New Wave*, pp 192-203, trans. Tom Milne.

5 Available in translation in Dixon's book. Originally published in *Les Cahiers du cinéma*, pp 61-3, March 1953.

6 The translation is Ruth Cassel Hoffman's, in Dixon's book.

Woman as "Feminine" (as deemed by Man): the former is professional, cold, rational; the latter, loving, nurturing and caring of her male lover. Within their analysis, these archetypes are the only alternatives to a woman's choice of identity, the latter somehow divorced from sexism. The intention is not to incriminate thinkers of another era, with the standards of our own. The intellectual society and culture which yielded *The Second Sex* (eight years earlier) was certainly capable of more sophisticated feminist (and/or feminist-oriented) discussion: Chabrol and Rohmer must have known something of the inquiries of de Beauvoir. They simply haven't grasped it — or neglect it.

Their study does offer an intriguing look at Hitchcock's early films: its historical penchant is of greater interest. As to its first intention, the achievement is a significant one, though the conclusion remains theoretically ill-thought. Hitchcockian morality — its depiction of evil, of our relationship to it, our strivance to defeat it and occasional inevitable complicity with it (e.g. *Rear Window*) — is given a cogent dissection, though consider its alleged relationship to directorial form: "Hitchcock is one of the greatest *inventors of*

forms in the entire history of cinema. Perhaps only Murnau and Eisenstein can sustain comparison with him when it comes to form. Our effort will not have been in vain if we have been able to demonstrate how an entire moral universe has been elaborated on the basis of form and by its very rigor. In Hitchcock's work, form does not embellish content, it creates it." [Chabrol and Rohmer, 152].

Such is the conclusion of the book (only two phrases follow). What constitutes a "form" and how this can be "invented" is not made clear, (as opposed to the more plausible suggestion that Hitchcock's expression through the film medium has wildly enhanced our perception of its expressive possibilities). As well, the distinction between form and content is a murky one: rather than repudiate the methods of some of Hitchcock's detractors, who claim his conscientious form is "too good" for his vulgar content, Chabrol and Rohmer merely invert it. Hitchcock's form is now the support for a profoundly rich content. It is never considered that form and content are bound in a rapport of interdependency and mutual inclusiveness (though this is hinted at... "an entire moral universe elaborated on the basis of form") — the form vs con-

Chabrol's *Le Boucher*, 1970



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tent argument should be an issue of debate, not of assumption. In this regard, the authors offer theoretical short-sightedness en lieu of theoretical rigour, an unexpected drawback.

However flawed Chabrol's and Rohmer's study remains, its importance is undeniable. Its historical significance notwithstanding, for all its loopholes its theoretical facet offers a particular interest. Chabrol and Rohmer emphasize the Catholic content of Hitchcock's films, integral to his moral viewpoint, and although this approach has been criticized, it stands possibly among the book's most valuable insights. Because Chabrol and Rohmer are insistent on linking Hitchcock's films to a pre-existent philosophical discourse, they open the doors as to how seriously these films may be taken: there is a marked difference between the (albeit non-negligible) analysis of an abstract set of ideas, and the analysis of ideas as belonging to a legitimately recognized tradition of thought and/or cultural heritage. There is a directly analogous, though not causal, link between the efforts of Chabrol and Rohmer, and more recent Freudian/Lacanian dissections of films such as *Vertigo*⁷. If Chabrol and Rohmer cannot be said to have directly inspired these more recent critical efforts, they can at least be said to have presciently anticipated their possibility.

To be fair, Truffaut's exchanges with Hitchcock can be endowed with comparable importance. Hitchcock remarked to Truffaut how the protagonist's obsession in *Vertigo* is tantamount to necrophilia, a statement with markedly Freudian undertones (i.e. the underpinning of human motivation as libidinal and, by socially and morally conventional understanding, "perverse"). Yet although the Freudian element seems evident, it is never discussed as such: the term "Freudian" isn't invoked and the concept of necrophilia is discussed as a distinct theme, and not referred to any theoretical discourse. There are (presumable) reasons for this. Hitchcock was never an intellectual filmmaker: his insight was not such to draw theoretical connections that so fascinate intellectuals and scholars. And Truffaut himself, as has already been noted, had little penchant for theory. Indeed, he "reviews" Hitchcock's films, in conversation (somewhat an extension of the digressive form of his earlier pieces): he doesn't seem to care to postulate a definitive line of interpretation for the works of the filmmaker, an itinerary so central to the approach of Chabrol and Rohmer.

Truffaut's non-theoretical inclination was complemented by his polemical interests: the reputed "Une certaine tendance du cinéma français" grew precisely from these two tendencies. Antoine de Baecque has argued that *Les cahiers du cinéma* grew in an intellectual climate of polemical tirades, though this factor isn't sufficient to account for the emergence of Truffaut's piece. Neither can Truffaut's cinephilic *lifestyle* - rewatching certain key films (such as *The Rules of the Game*) *ad infinitum*, and discussing them with equal endurance - the cultural and intellectual formation behind the writing of the piece.

Though these factors are no doubt of importance, and de Baecque is certainly right to bring them up, there are also other considerations to be maintained, more subtle and per-



Françoise Sagan and Claude Chabrol on the set of *Landru*, 1963

haps more arguable. Truffaut, more than any of his *Cahiers*/New Wave colleagues, was a gifted rhetorician. He could substitute impressionist assertions for reasoned argumentation: he often did, and his writing strengths owed more heavily to the former than to the latter. It shall be my contention that comparable abilities are evident in his early film-making (roughly, the first three pictures: *The 400 Blows*, *Shoot the Piano Player*, *Jules and Jim*), and underlie the rest of his directorial career, though inconsistently so.

"Une certaine tendance [...]" is a polemical manifesto against an acclaimed sector of contemporary French cinema, and also a vindication of a distinct counter-tradition, embodied in the works of Renoir, Bresson, Ophuls, Cocteau, among others. Truffaut's principal target is the Aurenche/Bost tandem, two influential screenwriters of literary adaptations, looked upon with reverence by critics, public and many a filmmaker alike. Filmmakers indeed take their turn working with the tandem, just as other screenwriters emulate them: they ultimately follow a distinctly recognizable formula, one that strikes Truffaut as complacent and uncreative. That much, the onset of his thesis, is well known.

What's of interest with the piece is its specific set of contented arguments. The "tradition de la Qualité", so unmistakably "bourgeois", is itself far more polemicizing than one might expect. Truffaut's twofold claim is that the films embrace an ideology of social criticism that is only a matter of false cynicism, as well as a stark betrayal of the adapted literary works.

This latter point — the betrayal of literature — is persuasively argued, with detailed examples. However, although

7 See for example Royal S. Brown's "Back From Among the Dead: The Restoration of Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo*", in *Cineaste* vol XXIII, no 1 (pp 4-10). The piece provides ample bibliographic material for other studies in the same vein, though it also gives the Chabrol/Rohmer study undue attention.

appealing, the argument does hold its conservative element: what's appalling to Truffaut is the "blasphemous" betrayal of literary works (Bermanos, Radiguet), the substitution of politicized, "anti-Establishment" content to previously, supposedly apolitical, purely dramatic semantics. Moreover, such substitutions, in the case of Radiguet, tend to ignore the cinematic potential within the novel: a perfectly filmable (i.e. visually evocative) scene of *Devil in the Flesh* (novel) is replaced by a more prosaic, politically pamphleteering episode in the film.

Despite this aesthetic element, the main thrust of the argument relies on a culturally conservative principle: one does not betray great literary works. For the argument to have greater salience, Truffaut need demonstrate that this "blasphemy" is politically disingenuous: we return to the former part of the contention, the false "bourgeois" cynicism. But unfortunately, he fails to develop a persuasive argument: he's forceful, and relies on the negative connotation of terms such as "bourgeois" and "Qualité".

Yet this, its historical notoriety notwithstanding, retrospectively is what's of most importance about the piece; i.e. its argumentative form: a series of "notes" (as a preface explains), written in a caustic, particularly confident tone. It anticipates some of the qualities of Truffaut's early films: both *Jules and Jim* and "Une certaine tendance..." yield comparable visions of expression. The film's fleeting quality, its tonal inconsistency, its eschewing of narrative coherence and priming of emotional spontaneity over any thorough, monological continuity: that's the aesthetic sensibility that has made its reputation. It's not entirely dissimilar to the mentality that informs "Une certaine tendance du cinéma français": the disjointed, emotional, volatile style and rhetorical approach, one that is in keeping with the other pieces of that era (e.g. the *Sudden Fear* review). Undoubtedly, the films following *Jules and Jim* mark a definite transition in Truffaut's career. Formal coherence from one picture to the next is now apparent. However, Truffaut's essential expressive style hasn't changed, only its scope: the formal polyphony of *Shoot the Piano Player* and *Jules and Jim* is now extended over to each and every film. From works as disparate as *Soft Skin*, *The Wild Child*, *Two English Girls and the Continent*, *Day for Night* etc., a discernible agenda of adventurous digressions into varied styles emerges. Whereas the criticism represented, for the most part, an excursion into non-linearity and impressionistically driven rhetoric, these same qualities are transposed onto the practise of filmmaking: first the furtive tonal inconsistencies operating within a film, and then, with *idiosyncratic consistency from film to film*.

Of course exceptions are to be made. One flagrant case is *The 400 Blows*, a seemingly conventional film in comparison to Truffaut's two succeeding works. But here the anti-conventional aesthetics aren't so much absent as less fully expressed: unexpected stylistic flourishes abound (cut to a shot of pigeons taking off as Doinel makes his away across a pavillon, the final long travelling and concluding freeze frame), and the narrative itself is episodic in structure. It is true as well, though, that repetition occurs within Truffaut's

career, though such repetition is thematic, and rarely stylistic. Needless to say, the change in style in turn is complicit with a modified perspective on the recurring theme. Consider only two of the Doinel films: *Stolen Kisses* and *Bed and Board*. They both have similar subjects — Antoine Doinel's perturbed love life — but their visual composition, the use of colours in particular, differ: light greys, occasional yellows and reds for the former, dark blues, black and wine reds for the latter, indicating more somber, brooding emotion.

Godard

I earlier stated that, despite a few exceptions, most criticism on the New Wave makes little direct inquiry into the connections between the cinema and the criticism. Richard Roud's introduction to *Godard on Godard* is one such exception, although the connection is intended to elucidate a thesis that ultimately privileges the importance of Godard's films (over his criticism). In retrospect, Godard's films are an optic through which one can read his criticism. Roud's critical intent is dissimilar to this essay's: he introduces the criticism as a prelude to the films, whereas here I would like to read New Wave criticism as distinctly comparable or contrastive to the films. Godard's criticism is of a piece with his succeeding films; it is also a body of work that cannot be reduced to this interpretive function alone.

I would like to consider Godard's criticism as elaborating a specific theoretical critique of *mise en scène*. In an early review of Hitchcock's *Strangers on a Train*, he writes: "the point is simply that all the freshness and invention of American films springs from the fact that they make the subjects the motive for the *mise en scène*." (*Godard on Godard*, 25). In a later piece, he testifies to the importance of *montage*:

"Cutting on a look is almost the definition of montage, its supreme ambition as well as its submission to *mise en scène*. It is, in effect, to bring out the soul under the spirit, the passion behind the intrigue, to make the heart prevail over the intelligence by destroying the notion of space in favour of that of time [...]

"[...] The montage, consequently, both denies and prepares the way for the *mise en scène*: the two are interdependent. To direct means to scheme, and one says of a scheme that it is well or badly mounted." (*GoG* 39-40).

Because a sophisticated understanding of Godard's films is inseparable from an understanding of the history of American film, so heavily coded is its intertextuality, one might be led to conclude that *mise en scène* is a construction onto itself, in Godard's perspective⁸. Nothing could be further from the truth. Consider only the opening paragraph of his review of an early Kubrick feature, *The Killing*:

"This is the film of a good pupil, no more. An admirer of Max Ophuls, Aldrich and John Huston, Stanley Kubrick is still far from being the bright boy heralded by the excited publicity surrounding this little gangster film which makes even *The Asphalt Jungle* look like a masterpiece by

comparison. [...] Kubrick claims his influence [of Ophuls] through irritating movements of the camera resembling those beloved of the director of *Le Plaisir*. But what in Ophuls corresponds to *a certain vision of the world* [emphasis added], in Kubrick is mere showing-off." (*GoG* 69).

The understanding of cinema as conveying a "vision of the world" is equally present in his notable article on Ingmar Bergman, titled "Bergmanorama." True, Godard does state: "the cinema is sufficient unto itself." (*GoG* 76). But the statement is misleading. Godard, in the article, is referring to a distinct quality of the cinema as differentiated from the other arts: its potency, its capacity to overwhelm. This understanding is joined by an ambivalence as to the cinema's possible commercialization: "It's cinema' is more than a pass-word, it's the war-cry of both film-publicist and film-lover." (*GoG* 76).

The point of ambivalence isn't pursued. Instead, Godard reverts back to an extollation of film art, via an analysis of Ingmar Bergman. The director is "the film-maker of the instant." (77):

"In the Bergman aesthetic, those shots of lakes, forests, grass, clouds, the deliberately unusual camera angles, the elaborately careful back-lighting [...] are integrated into the psychology of the characters at the precise instant when Bergman wants to evoke an equally precise feeling: for instance, Monika's pleasure is conveyed in her journey by boat through an awakening Stockholm, and her weariness by reversing the journey through a Stockholm setting down to sleep." (77)

If film is capable of rendering the instantaneity in time, the montage is the means that heightens this effect. The above cited essay, "Montage my Fine Cane", has made this point clear. In an analysis of Hitchcock's *The Wrong Man* of remarkable detail, Godard puts into practise these aesthetic interests. Analysing a scene in which the falsely convicted protagonist enters his cell, Godard details the simple construction of shots/reverse shots ("he looks at the bed - reverse angle of the bed; the washbasin — reverse angle of the washbasin [...]"), concluding that: "We realize he is seeing without looking [...]" (50). "Once again Alfred Hitchcock proves that the cinema today is better fitted than either philosophy or the novel to convey the basic data of consciousness." Hitchcock's protagonist is a victim of chance, and his montage and camera capture this sense of enclosure. Within the diegesis of the film for Godard, the overwhelming power of chance and its cinematic equivalent in Hitchcock's filmic art may be nearly indistinguishable; he is very aware of the film's aesthetic construction, and yet "These neo-realist notations are never gratuitous. They are so many precipitates of a body whose nature — to paraphrase La Bruyère — reveals itself once thrown into the battle of the world." (51).

What fascinates Godard is not just the mediated rapport of film to reality, almost as unmediated as it may seem at

times, but also, conversely, the links between film aesthetics and the other arts. Hence the recurring term, in his reviews/articles, of "Velasquez grey" that Thomson has mocked him for.⁹ But more than just name-dropping, Godard looks to *mise en scène* as he does to architecture, as a *geometrical construction*. In a review of Alexandre Astruc's *Une Vie*, he interprets the *mise en scène* as relying on two axes of movement; namely, the horizontal and the vertical. This sense of movement, often conveyed by way of a character in motion, or a character's sudden gesture, ultimately reveals the "kinship of this so-called 'cold' film with Edgar Poe, the true master of mystery and the most abstract writer of all." (98).

Une Vie not only imparts a sense of immediacy, a "discontinuity" through the continuous "abruptness of gesture", but more importantly demonstrates the cinema's ability for certain *metaphysical transgressions*. This is what ultimately, in this specific review, Godard seems to value most, that through the film "the effect becomes almost the cause [emphasis his]." The proclamation of Poe being "the most abstract writer of all" is not fortuitous. Nor is it an effort of Godard to isolate the film from any larger plane of reality. For Godard, film can restructure our understanding of experience and time; in this case by manipulating our sense of chronology and linearity, so that the effect may (almost) become the cause, so that continuity may in reality be a long discontinuity, marked by what he terms "brusquerie."¹⁰ All this is conveyed by way of architecture: Godard makes a firm connection between the abstract nature of the deployed horizontal and vertical axes, and our analogous sense of experience. It's integral to Astruc's vision of the world: "Where they [the disappointed audience] expected Astruc the lyricist, they found Astruc the architect." (96).

Throughout the 1950s, Godard dissected film. He catalogued it, and his critical writings represent an evolved film language all to its own. In such a light, I would like to propose that the sixties, his first foray into commercially released filmmaking, is an effort to "de-articulate" all the knowledge he has assimilated. *Godard on Godard* is full of revealing juxtapositions between shots from films Godard studied, and near (and sometimes not so near) identical shots in his own directorial work. To put the matter crudely, he got wound up in film, and then had to unwind this process through reels and reels of his own work.

In a 1985 interview with Alain Bergala, which introduces *Godard par Godard: les années Cahiers*, Godard declares that, despite his critical attention to a film's subject matter in his reviews, his own work is virtually without subject matter. The remark may seem to give credence to Simon's earlier cited (in footnote) disclaimer, that Godard's films "have nothing to say", yet it simply is not true. Obviously, the idea of any artistic expression with no subject is an ontological impossibility.

8 Example: John Simon's famous attack on Godard's films, reprinted in *Private Screenings*, concludes with the sarcastic quip that they have "nothing to say".

9 In his *Biographical Dictionary of Film*.

10 Meaning "abruptness," though in the English translation of *Godard on Godard*, the word isn't italicized, de-emphasising the terminological value it has in the original French text.

Godard's own ensuing remarks either refute the statement, or modify it significantly: *Deux ou trois choses que je sais d'elle* is about the Parisian district, *Made in the USA* and *Pierrot le fou* are about the cinema itself and "sa manière de traiter les choses" [its manner of handling things]. He then describes his fascination with filmmaking for its allowance of moving forward on instinct; as Bergala says, the director finds his/her subject along the way.

Probably what Godard means is that the filmmaker is ideally unbounded in a way the artists of other media are not. He describes *Broken Blossoms* as a "tableau" with no subject (whereas *Birth of a Nation* and *Intolerance* are more thematically oriented). What's implied is that the film's commitment to portraiture is what attracts Godard. Film captures reality in a way that seems spontaneous and constantly self-inventing; much like the disruptive, impressionistic quality of his prose (and later his films). He may resemble early Truffaut in this regard, though the sensibilities differ radically. For Godard's understanding of cinema represents a fully articulated theoretical position, albeit one that is at times confusedly expressed (i.e. the film with *no subject*). His directorial career is painstakingly aware of film, of more precisely *his films*, as pinpointed in a chart that is both historical and contemporaneously diverse: other films have preceded his, other arts co-exist with his own. From *Breathless* to *Weekend* one finds the acute depiction of film aesthetics as interconnected with a flux of discourses. Just one example: the constant shift in genres in *Pierrot le fou*, from musical comedy to gangster B movie, to the Robinson Crusoe myth. The famous Samuel Fuller cameo is in part a red herring: Fuller describes cinema as "in one word: emotion." But if there's any emotion, it's in the abruptness of linguistic discontinuity.

The possible suggestion that cinema, moreover artistic language, is politically neutral is a mistake. Consider only that in *Pierrot le fou*, contemporary to Vietnam, Godard makes a clear editorial statement: "US=SS." Godard's writings and films aren't reducible to politics, but they approach the sphere of the political. Indeed, in an early piece of his, "Pour un cinéma politique," he recognizes the necessity of connecting art to contemporary historical realities. "Unhappy film-makers of France who lack scenarios, how is it that you have not yet made films about the tax system, the death of Philippe Henriot, the marvellous life of Danielle Casanova?"¹¹ ("Pour un cinéma politique", *GoG* 17). Much of the piece is rhetorical — Godard seems to be petitioning for a recourse to propaganda — but its significance in the growth of his career cannot be diminished. This political and ideological imperative of the early fifties, becomes a matter of discourse facing discourse, by the mid-sixties. The American soldiers present in *Pierrot le fou* are a throwback to typified characters in a well-known American genre. Godard acknowledges the generic convention, but undermines its conventional ideological content (US=SS). He abstracts it from one aesthetic mode, and reveals it as belonging to an ulterior reality (one that he articulates). The motivation is political, though also (more prominently) philosophical. Godard is working with the abstract: the recuperation of aes-

thetic/cultural conventions from one pre-established discourse (the American war film), transposed into a new established discourse (Godard's genre-mixing *Pierrot le fou*), and intermingled with a potent political statement.

In short, Godard's critique of film is that it reveals realities that are emotionally immediate, but also philosophically abstract, through the medium of *mise en scène* that is a conscientious aesthetic elaboration, though one whose effects are (once again) immediately, emotionally felt. In filmmaking, this process is abstracted into demonstrated theory. Godard the critic detailed the practise of other filmmakers, then as a filmmaker preached this practise (self-consciously, self-reflexively). The transition was immediate and fluid.

Rohmer and Chabrol

One can turn to two essays written by Rohmer, which most well characterize his approach to film. "Le cinéma, art de l'espace" (1948) attempts to argue for an essentialist understanding of cinema, one relying on an analysis of its portrayal of space (Godard's writing on cinema's rapport to temporality, was a direct response to Rohmer). He turns in particular to the works of Buster Keaton, where he finds an "*obsession d'un certain espace de maladresse et de solitude*"¹², which is accompanied by an interest for geometry, and activity related to geometrical surroundings. Moreover:

*"L'isolement des êtres et des projets apparaît chez Buster Keaton comme constitutif de la nature même de l'espace; isolement exprimé en particulier par le thème du mouvement et du va-et-vient — tout étant comme un 'renvoyé' continuellement à soi —, par les chutes brutales, les aplatissements sur le sol, par la saisie maladroite d'objets qui se dérobent ou se brisent, comme si le monde extérieur étant par son essence même inapte à être 'saisi'."*¹³

Rohmer's other revealing piece is a review of Rossellini's *Europa '51*, entitled "Génie du christianisme." Rossellini embraces an understanding of the human condition which Rohmer identifies with the concerns of Christianity. Both the director and the religion centre upon the material-spiritual rapport, an apparent opposition, and its tensions by which the human subject achieves an acute, moral self-awareness. Rohmer addresses the concept of "spiritual flesh"; in *Europa '51*, the Ingrid Bergman protagonist traverses a state of solitude and alienation which paradoxically leads her to a "*voie vers la charité et, au terme de son échec humain, [elle] accède à la sainteté*".¹⁴

Rohmer's interest in Rossellini's traditionalist morality, its connection with an exploration of human drama, predates his critique (with Chabrol) of Hitchcock: exploring the religiously informed content of the director's work. Both Rohmer's concern with space, and his preoccupation with Christian morality, inform his directorial work as well. The debut feature, *Le signe de lion* (1961), although stylistically contrastive to the more renowned (and succeeding) *contes moraux*, has a narrative that is traversed by miraculous narrative twists, and testifies, first and foremost thematically, to the

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imprisoning space of Paris (as well as the evil inherent in our presumably mundane attachment to money).

The subsequent *contes moraux*, and following cycles of films, exemplify these stylistic and thematic concerns. Characters are circumscribed within a unique, privileged social space. Very little action occurs, especially on behalf of the males; one gathers that their freedom to action is short-circuited by the enclosures of socially normative values, their own idiosyncratic natures, and cinematic dramatic space delimited by Rohmer. At the same time, the males seem to operate in accordance with particularly fixated goals that, such is the case of Trintignant in *Ma nuit chez Maude*, blind them to the transient realities of everyday life. The morality may be that between these analogous experiences to the material and the spiritual, they pass off the former for the latter, they fail to realize a balance comparable to "spiritual flesh". As a director, Rohmer studies this tension through simple medium and long shots, eschewing close ups, transfixing the action within a relative distance. In a way comparable to Hitchcock, the characters seem subject (arguably *are* subject) to a definitive rigour of form.

One could consider Chabrol, more explicitly than his contemporaries, a critic-*auteur*. Although his criticism is varied, he shows a particular affinity with the films of Hitchcock, as well as detective and crime narratives. The latter are topics he has revisited during the course of his career, and it's hardly a matter of argument that his directorial sensibility has closely been influenced by that of Hitchcock. Consider his distinctive approaches in two different written pieces: a review of *Singin' in the Rain* and an essay on the film *noir*. In the latter case, Chabrol approaches the matter with expertise: he chronicles the rise and fall of the detective novel, then describes its reemergence (to prestige) in forties filmmaking, only to contrast the cases of more genre convention adhering *noir* films (*The Big Sleep*) with the more idiosyncratic expressions of an Orson Welles (*Lady from Shanghai*). Needless to say, Chabrol admires the work of Hawks; the contrast to Welles is without reproach.

In the *Singin' in the Rain* review, Chabrol's approach is less contextual. He focuses on the film itself, its rapport with the audience, and less with its interconnectedness with the musical genre (save some obvious remarks: dance allows you to say what words cannot express). The piece is fascinating, because Chabrol works on the interaction between spectator and film: the pleasure in watching the musical, the desire to be part of the film. Perhaps lacking the historical expertise of the musical comedy (its links to Broadway), he can only fall back on how *he*, moviegoer, feels about the spectacle. Regrettably, this more adventurous tendency is less evident in his filmmaking. For Chabrol most often chooses subjects with which he has a pre-established generic and cultural familiarity: social crime narratives, such as the works of Simenon, Highsmith, Ruth Rendell, or historical events fulfilling his social and cultural interests.

Hence Chabrol's career, or at least his more typical "Chabrolian" works, can be read from the viewpoint of his historical and scholarly interests: an application of his criti-

cally acquired knowledge to film. But unlike Godard, he never considered this application, in itself, as integral to the subject of the film. Without ever imitating, he actualizes what he admired. He is committed to remaining an *auteur* whom he may have lauded as a critic.

Both Chabrol and Rohmer elaborated fixed theoretical interests in film, in large part a pursuance of already laid-down innovations. Although each has diverged as filmmaker (more Chabrol than Rohmer), a persistency has been maintained. Unfortunately, this has consisted in adherence to theoretical paradigms that arguably curtail their creative possibilities. The films of Rohmer and Chabrol follow a monological course of fixed meaning, much like the most part of their criticism. Although this meaning is at times elusive to the viewer, to the filmmaker it is always coherently designed and intellectually predetermined.

For Godard, this intellectual predetermination is absorbed within the process of creativity, manifest in the film. For Truffaut, such intellectual predetermination is elided by the very method of creativity. Thematic intelligence is expressed, but not by any vantage point of conscientious formulation. Even Truffaut's (much berated) Hitchcockian excursions (*Soft Skin*, *Fahrenheit 451*, *The Mississippi Mermaid*) do not deviate from this character of invention: his approach to a Hitchcockian sensibility is exploratory; he enters new territory. He doesn't circumvent it. An apt formulation may be: Eric Rohmer and Claude Chabrol *order* their effects, Jean-Luc Godard and François Truffaut *create* them.

Note

In clarifying the correlatives between critical theory (or lack thereof) and artistic creativity, I have evidently made, in conclusion, speculatively critical, evaluative claims as to the work of the New Wave (save Jacques Rivette). As there is some pioneering intent as to this critical procedure, *with respect to the New Wave*, I can't lay claim to any definitive conclusion. The conclusion itself represents only a partial fraction of the whole textual analysis, contained within the essay. That should suffice to indicate how much more extensively this subject remains to be explored, thought out.

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11 Tom Milne, co-translator of *Godard on Godard*, offers a much needed historical annotation to these last two names. Henriot was an executed Nazi collaborator, Casanova a member of the Resistance. The statement suggests the hesitancy of *bourgeois* France towards the disquiet of its near-immediate past.

12 "obsession for a site [i.e. space/espace] of awkwardness and solitude." (my translation).

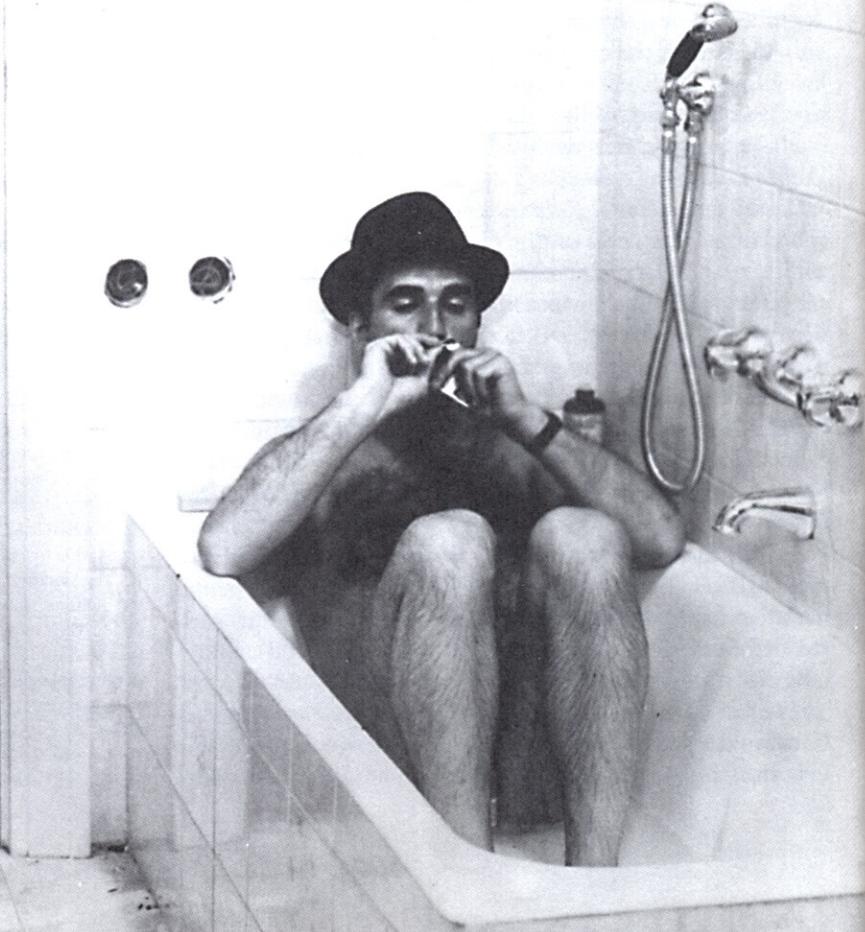
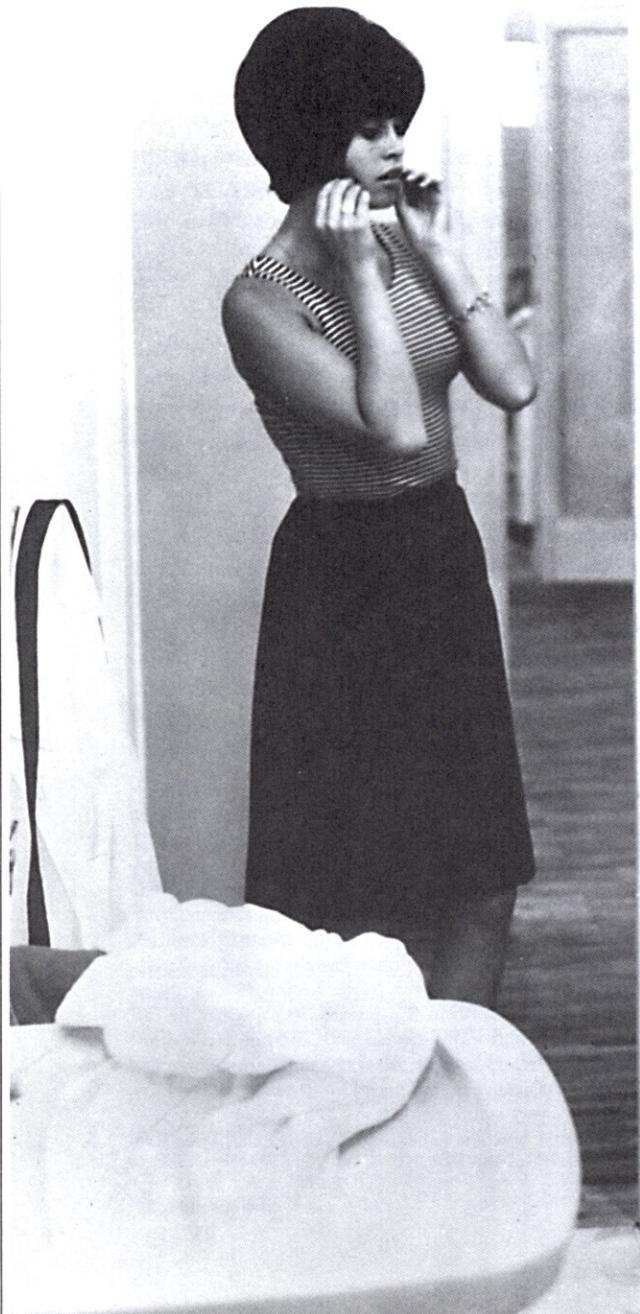
13 "the isolation of beings and projects [? - Rohmer might mean the characters' actions, though it isn't clear] appears, with Buster Keaton, as constitutive of the very nature of space; the isolation is expressed, in particular, by the theme of movement and back-and-forth [movement] - all being as a continual throw back to oneself -, by sudden falls, flat drops to the ground, by the awkward seizing of objects which elude [our grasp] [se dérobent] or break, as if this external world, by its very nature, was not apt to be 'seized'."

14 "path to charity and, at the outcome of her human failure, [she] accedes to Sainthood."

Coping With Contempt

Godard's Rejected Male and his Hollywood Prototypes

by Brian Fairlamb



That there were Hollywood influences upon the French New Wave has never been in doubt. Critical analysis and debate has tended to focus upon the early films such as Godard's *Breathless* (1959) and Truffaut's *Shoot the Pianist* (1960) and their elements of homage and pastiche, while films of the mid to late 60s have generally been accepted as more ambivalent or antagonistic to Hollywood/ America — often for reasons connected with the political sensibilities of the era or the filmmaker's perceived or assumed standpoint at the time.

My own research project has focused upon attempting to trace what I suspect to be a continuing and quite profound influence throughout this period, and to link the enduring appeal of specific Hollywood generic, thematic and iconographic forms to the ways in which they tapped into the psychological and social conflicts arising from the post-war crisis of masculinity in our increasingly materialistic Western society. Godard's *Contempt* (*Le Mépris*) of 1963 is a particularly good example of the extent to which Hollywood models of masculinity — of how to be a man — remained attractive to French intellectuals of the period. And I want to argue that one reason for the appeal of certain generic forms and thematic structures in this instance was that the problems they portrayed and attempted to resolve in the stories of characters such as Bama Dillert (*Some Came Running*) and Dude (*Rio Bravo*) — both played by Dean Martin — had real personal resonances for Godard himself.

It is worth recalling in this context that following the British re-release of Godard's *Contempt* in *Sight and Sound*, Colin MacCabe celebrated it as 'one of the few examples of a genuinely European film', and one which 'bears witness to the swift disillusionment that the young *Cahiers du cinéma* critics-turned-directors felt for Hollywood cinema'.¹ Thus, compared to other films Godard made during the sixties, *Contempt* has — despite the presence of Jack Palance and Fritz Lang in its cast — traditionally been seen as a work in which European influences predominate over those of Hollywood cinema.

The fact that the story was based on a novella by Moravia and that there are references to, and parallels with, Rossellini's *Viaggio in Italia* can be said to account for a certain critical foregrounding of European sources, as in the study by Jacques Aumont.² I want to inject a note of caution into such a reading, for two reasons. Firstly, some of the parallels which could be assumed to be Godardian *hommage* are part of the fabric of the novella, which was written when Moravia was working within the Italian film industry. Indeed, the scenario writer of *Viaggio in Italia* has remarked how he recognised aspects of his own personal history in the story.³ Secondly, this reading discounts the plans Godard initially made for shooting this big budget movie in Hollywood with stars such as Sinatra and Kim Novak. If ultimately he settled for production at Cinecitta, as in the novel, with its readymade echoes of Rossellini's work, it would be less than surprising to find parallels and references within scenario and *mise-en-scene* to *Viaggio* and its director. However, some of Godard's own comments should caution against over-emphasising this influence, since he himself has talked in terms of

the European thematic or cinematic elements being altered or improved by being treated more in the Hollywood fashion. In making this film, Godard has stated that he wanted to make 'a successful Antonioni, in other words filmed by Hawks'.⁴ And if the mention of Hawks were not enough of a clue, a further quotation makes abundantly clear that it was in the conception of a certain noble or epic quality in the masculinity of the Hollywood hero that the director found his major inspiration, as he discusses

'the transformation of the hero who, in passing from book to screen, moves from false adventure to real, from Antonioni inertia to *Laramie*sque dignity'.⁵

These comments alone should be enough reason for not dismissing the Hollywood references of *Contempt* as purely those of a cinephile. And, as many have remarked, Godard liked to feature players who were living citations, who brought with them aspects of their cinematic persona or individual history. Jack Palance, of course, brings echoes of his tough guy / Western villain roles to the part of Prokosch, the producer, while Fritz Lang — even allowing for the fact that he is working in Italy here and speaks French and German onscreen, (and can therefore stand as a civilised European against the vulgar or 'fascist' American), brings from his long career reminders of the compromises that are required to succeed in Hollywood. And, while Michel Piccoli brings his associations with Melville's Hollywood-influenced gangster films (*Le Doulos*), the script makes clear that, with his ever-present hat, he is also a walking reference to the Dean Martin character in Minnelli's *Some Came Running*.

Generically, therefore, as Robert Stam has observed, *Contempt* 'fits squarely into the tradition of films about film-making and even of Hollywood films about Hollywood'.⁶ Godard himself has acknowledged a debt to Minnelli's films of this type, such as *Two Weeks In Another Town* and *The Bad and the Beautiful*.

The connections between Godard's film and *Two Weeks In Another Town* are particularly strong — both are about international co-productions set at Cinecitta being directed by Hollywood veterans, and have neurotic or insecure male protagonists in a subservient position to both director and money-conscious producer. Other thematic links are the communication problems, both linguistically and on a personal level; the mutual exploitation and betrayals; and the past history of Andrus's (Kirk Douglas) wife having had an affair with Kruger, the director (Edward G. Robinson), which parallels the triangle of Paul Javal (Michel Piccoli), the writer hired by Prokosch (Jack Palance), the producer, who makes no secret of his pursuit of Javal's wife, Camille (Brigitte Bardot) in the Godard film. Stam affirms Elsaesser's argu-

1 Colin MacCabe, *Sight and Sound*, BFI, 1996, pp.55-56.

2 Susan Hayward and Ginette Vincendeau, eds., *French Film: Texts and Contexts*, London: Routledge, 1990.

3 Michel Marie, *Le Mépris — Jean-Luc Godard*, Paris: Edition Nathan, 1990, pp.25-6.

4 S. Hayward and G. Vincendeau, op.cit., p.223.

5 Tom Milne, ed., *Godard on Godard*, New York: Da Capo Press, 1986, p.200. His italics, reference is to Mann's *The Man From Laramie*.

6 Robert Stam, *Reflexivity in Film and Literature from Don Quixote to Jean-Luc Godard*, Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1985, p.98.



Kirk Douglas and Cyd Charisse in
Two Weeks in Another Town

ment that Minnelli's films are thinly disguised auteurist parables where tragedy takes the form of constraints on an emotional or artistic temperament, and goes on to suggest that Minnelli the auteur is split into the two protagonists, Kruger, the autocratic director and Andrus the neurotic, failing actor who takes over directing when the former falls ill. In cinematic terms Stam reads this as a representation of the death of the old Hollywood system and the birth of the new. In so doing he fails to pick out any parallels in the Godard film with Minnelli's doubling of the protagonists, preferring to see *Contempt* as 'an auteurist cry of resentment against producers generally' and argues that its real subject is 'artistic prostitution.'

I want to argue that if we can see Minnelli the auteur in this way, then Godard the auteur can also be seen as divided into the two protagonists in his film. As with Andrus and Kruger in Minnelli's scenario, the conflicting masculinities of Javal and Prokosch provide the motor for a plot which likewise involves the removal of the patriarchal figure by a sudden twist of fate, in Godard's case by his actual death rather than the allegorical death provided by Kruger's heart attack. Among the attributes which Stam marshals to support the notion that Prokosch represents everything Godard despised are his function as a producer, a profiteer who is elitist and despises the public, who indulges in dominating behaviour like a 'savage god', with his 'flatulent sports car' that suggests his 'vast stores of unwarranted arrogance'. This is a reading which foregrounds the melodramatic features of Godard's

film, a relationship that the director himself seems to have resisted, preferring to describe it as a tragedy, and a number of commentators have followed his lead — especially those for whom tracing the classical and European literary pedigree of the work was a major concern. Since the film was made, of course, film theory has re-evaluated the category of melodrama, particularly through the study of works by some of the Hollywood directors Godard most admired, including Minnelli himself. Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, in his study of Minnelli, compared tragedy with melodrama, and came to recognize the latter as a bourgeois form more concerned with family and local or middling power relations and the oedipal drama, although it was the 'inheritor of many tragic concerns'.⁷ Though space precludes full discussion of the categories here, Nowell-Smith's generalizations provide some useful pointers to ways in which Godard's film can be seen as having a much closer relation to his Hollywood intertexts than has traditionally been accepted. I am thinking in particular of the argument that what is at stake in the Hollywood melodrama, commonly played out through exploring the question of the survival of a family unit, 'is the possibility for individuals of acquiring an identity which is also a place within the system, a place in which...they can enter, without contradiction, the symbolic order and bourgeois society'. In Godard's scenario Paul Javal's fear of artistic prostitution in his relation with the Hollywood producer is intimately connected with the conflicts, both financial and sexual, within his fragile marriage, and his refusal of a place within the Hollywood/bourgeois system, after appearing to consider prostituting his wife within it by conspiring to leave her alone with Prokosch, is followed by her contemptuous rejection of him.

I would therefore argue that Hollywood, its money and its star system, its melodramatic mode and its self-reflexivity, are all central to Godard's thematic and this is nowhere more evident than in the question of his casting. His original idea of hiring Sinatra and ultimate casting of Palance is crucial. The latter's star persona and history provide another echo of *Two Weeks in Another Town*, since his tough guy roles in action movies, Westerns and epics parallel the career of Kirk Douglas, the star of Minnelli's movie, but, more significantly, he is another living citation — not a French noirish version of an American tough, but the real thing. Stam gives an auteurist spin to the Palance character's name — in support of his argument that Prokosch represents the Philistine producers that Godard despised — suggesting that the initials are a direct reference to the film's producers, combining that of Carlo Ponti's last name with Joseph Levine's first name. However, it seems just as likely to have been a *hommage* to Jack Palance himself, in the same way as the name of the 'fictional' cameraman, R. Kutard, displayed on the clapperboard of the film within the film, refers back to the actual film's cinematographer, Raoul Coutard. The *hommage* in this case would presumably be confined to the screen persona or masculine archetype represented by Palance, as distinct from the actor himself, who by all accounts had an acrimonious relationship with the director on this film.⁸ Godard's own



Brigitte Bardot and Jack Palance in the red Maserati.

ambivalent fascination with these masculine types, (who represent 'the maximum of liberty, the false liberty of a naughty boy' ⁹, and the actors who portrayed them is well documented in his writings and movie references. This can also be said to apply to the recurring imagery of that icon of masculine power and possession, the 'flatulent' red sports car, dismissed by Stam as an expression of Godard's distaste for crude and autocratic producers. However, one only has to think of how many Godard protagonists are seen driving such vehicles to realize that it can also be seen as one of the 'heroic machines' that John Orr sees as characterizing the director's ambivalent fascination with the 'possessive individualism' that distinguishes American representations of cars and their owners.¹⁰ It might also be considered a direct reference to the similar red Maserati provided by Kruger for Jack Andrus in *Two Weeks*, and its vivid red is clearly part of the symbolic language of colour used within the film — Bardot is seen bathed in red light at the beginning and in blood at the end — and carries at various points connotations of arousal, warning, prostitution, and death.

Returning to the theme of doubling and the possible significance of the male protagonists' names, however, a further putative decoding of the initials can be attempted, if we relate those of Piccoli's character Paul Javal to those of J. Prokosch; identical letters, though reversed — a factor which Stam may have missed since he appears to have transcribed the name as 'Laval'. Doubles are a theme to which Godard seemed particularly drawn, often making reference to literary and cine-

matic precursors, as in *Pierrot le Fou* where Pierrot/ Ferdinand retells Poe's story of William Wilson's sinister alter ego. In arguing for the centrality of Hollywood sources to the thematic development of the film under scrutiny here, I want to explore this theme and its connection not only with Minnelli's oeuvre, but also the works of Hawks to which Godard made specific reference within *Contempt* itself. In order to do this, it is necessary to consider the actual sources of the ambivalence apparent in his representation of the producer, a typically monopathic melodramatic character symbolizing the law and power of the Father.

Producers, fathers and the control of money

The scene in *Contempt* where Prokosch orders Francesca (Georgia Moll) to bend over while he writes out a cheque for Paul Javal on her back has been much discussed. Noting that his remark 'Whenever I hear the word culture, I get out my checkbook' is a paraphrase of Goebbels, Stam relates this to other aspects of the script (e.g., Lang's describing the producer as a dictator), in order to argue that Prokosch 'embodies the fascism of money and its contempt for all values other than monetary ones' (Stam, 1985, p.102). In this reading, Godard's film community becomes a microcosm of the

7 Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, 'Minnelli and Melodrama', *Screen*, vol.18, no.2, pp. 113-18.

8 Michel Marie, op.cit., p.57.

9 Jean-Luc Godard, *Introduction à une véritable histoire du cinéma*, Paris: Albatros, 1980, pp.26-36, my translation.

10 John Orr, op.cit.,



Paul and Camille

exploitative relationships in modern capitalist society, and the parallel prostitution of Javal's wife and of his own artistic talents dramatizes the destruction of culture 'through tyrannical pressure on art'.

Despite his apparent contempt for producers and the constraints they place upon the artist/film auteur, however, Godard has acknowledged in print that he recognized something of himself in the fictional producer in this film, through his own experience and enjoyment of the day-to-day control that access to their money gave him. In a section on *Contempt* in *Une véritable histoire du cinéma* (1980), Godard commented that he was a little like the producer in that he quickly learnt the importance of the control of money, and how its possession gave one the time and the power to spend it according to one's own rhythm or pleasure.¹¹ A further remark from this interview gives a proto-Freudian slant to this drive to control money and use the power it delegates to manipulate people and events. Godard recalls how much he resented his father when asking him for money, and the way his father would always interrogate him about what he was going to use it for before handing it over. This he hated, since what he desired was the power or freedom that possession of money gives to a person to spend it however they like. In a

biographical sketch published in 1992 Colin MacCabe revealed just how much these remarks reflect patterns of thought and behaviour which dominated Godard's family and personal relationships in his formative years and beyond.¹² Tensions within the family, characterized as 'grande bourgeoisie' on his mother's side and 'petit bourgeois' on his father's often crystallized around money, with Godard often in conflict with his father, and having support withdrawn — for example, during his extensive travels in South America. He regularly stole money from within the family, and later from employers, which eventually also brought him into conflict with the law and led to his father committing him to a psychiatric hospital for a considerable period.

This theme of the social constraints and liberties which possession/lack of possession (or control) of money entails had earlier been identified by MacCabe himself as one which runs through Godard's work, and undergoes many transformations. MacCabe argued that initially two images of money are opposed, as in *Breathless*, where money 'in its normal social function where it is understood within a context of work and frustration' is contrasted with 'criminal money within a context of desire and liberation'.¹³ Thus Michel Poiccard spends his time in Paris in a fruitless quest to cash a

crossed cheque — money 'caught up in a social nexus of financial institutions' — which contrasts with the instant gratification that the money he steals provides. Discussing Godard's later statement that this was the film he liked least because it was 'fascist', MacCabe located its fascism in 'its refusal of the reality of social relations and the propagation of the myth of an existence outside those relations' and saw the money opposition 'mapped on to sexual difference' in the way that Patricia's concern with work and career are contrasted with Michel's determination to live only for the moment.

This is of interest if we relate it to Stam's reading of *Contempt*, in which the pressures upon Javal are similarly labelled 'fascist' and his possible capitulation to them a form of artistic prostitution. This concentration on the relationship with Prokosch, understandable though it is in a book which is addressing all aspects of cinematic reflexivity, does tend to disregard the centrality of the Paul/Camille conflict and the ways in which the money opposition is here again mapped on to sexual difference. Here, by contrast, we find the reverse of *Breathless*, in that it is the male partner whose concerns are with work, career and property, and the woman who lives for the moment. The economic pressures upon Paul seem connected to his already fragile marriage, as when after Camille asks him how much he will be paid for the scenario, he replies, as if in defence: '10,000 dollars... 6 million lire — on pourrait finir de payer l'appartement...'¹⁴ She follows this with a comment on her impatience for the curtains he was supposed to be having made. All of this seems to fuel her discontent, and she claims to have been happier before they knew cinema folk even though they hadn't much money.

The personal and professional compromises required of him within the marriage are further highlighted when Camille pulls out of his 'revolver pocket' (as the published script describes it, pp.51-2) a Communist Party membership card which he has not told her about and which seems to confirm her contempt for him. While I do not wish to argue that there is a clear Marxist intention within this film, as there would be in his later films of the decade, nor that Godard regarded the Bardot character as a representative of fascism — particularly as her motivation is never entirely explained — these factors do put her firmly in the other camp, as part of the economic tyranny of bourgeois society ranged against the male protagonist. And mapped on to sexual difference in this way, the subject of artistic prostitution can be seen to be masking more psychologically profound themes centred upon the anxieties attendant upon male impotence, castration or emasculation and a homosocial Oedipal conflict in which access to and control of money (and guns and cars) are central — and deeply ambivalent — metaphors for the oppressive nature of family/ patriarchal hierarchies and the fragility of male status within them.

Paul's greatest fear is prostituting himself within his subservient relationship with the producer and his money, and the latter is a monopathic character we can recognize as typical of melodrama, a genre in which he would be said to embody the Law and power of the Father. And moreover, in melodrama, in an insight for which I am again indebted to

Nowell-Smith's account, where the central figure is male (Javal in this case) 'there is regularly an impairment of his "masculinity," a castration imposed by the law.' Javal is therefore further emasculated in this scenario through needing money for the apartment which he thinks will keep his wife happy — and thus denies himself the freedom to spend it as he would like, a dilemma which, of course, again mirrors Godard's eternal conflict with his father over money. Moreover, this dilemma also mirrors the director's situation in the making of this film since there is an interesting parallel here with the proportion of its budget that Bardot the actress required, and which therefore restricted Godard's freedom in terms of other production values. He has commented that in what was a big budget operation for him, he had no more available for the actual shoot than on his other films after the star's salaries were paid.¹⁵

Javal's emasculation and rejection are made clear by his wife's contemptuous looks and the withdrawal of her sexual favours. This is intensified in the Capri scenes by his positioning as a voyeur in her seduction by Prokosch. We noted earlier Godard's penchant for expressing masculine power and freedom through his character's relationship to cars and guns. It is Prokosch, of course, who possesses that domain of crude masculine power, the red sports car, from which Javal was earlier excluded in favour of his wife, and into which Camille again enters at the end, becoming by association a possession of the producer. In this film, however, it is Paul who carries the gun — an incident and gangsterish accoutrement not present in the Moravia novel — but women are seen to constantly dispossess him of it or its potency. Thus, Francesca picks up the gun when he leaves it on the boat, while it later transpires that Camille had taken the precaution of taking the bullets out of it. Though Prokosch's arrogance and dominance are associated with fascism in his exchanges with Francesca, particularly in his paraphrasing, as quoted earlier, of Goebbel's *Diktat* 'Whenever I hear the word culture, I get out my revolver', it is in fact Paul, the struggling artist — and the auteur's alter ego in this reading — who gets out his revolver, which is hidden among books, the very emblems of culture (which, of course, fascists once literally and symbolically destroyed), on the shelves of the apartment. That this is no coincidence can be argued from the repetition of such incidents where guns are hidden or concealed behind books in *Pierrot le Fou* and *La Chinoise*.

If, as Robert Stam has argued, the casting of Palance can be said 'to tell us something about Godard's view of the cultural role of producers' (i.e., that he 'reincarnates fascism in a subtler form'), then the casting of Michel Piccoli can be said to be rather significant. With his trademark hat and gun he

11 Godard, op.cit., p.86.

12 'Jean-Luc Godard: A Life in Seven Episodes (To Date)' in Raymond Bellour with Mary Lea Bandy, eds., *Jean-Luc Godard: Son + Image 1974-1991*, New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1992, pp.13-21.

13 Colin MacCabe, *Godard: Images, Sounds, Politics*. London: BFI, 1980, pp.27-48.

14 script of *Le Mépris* in *L'AVANT SCENE cinéma*, no.412-3, May/June 1992.

15 Godard, op.cit., p.85.

carries gangster associations from *Le Doulos*, while in the script Piccoli's character relates his attachment to his hat to that of the superstitious gambler played by Dean Martin in Minnelli's *Some Came Running*. In his scenario notes Godard in fact described the character as 'd'aspect antipathique, dans le genre de gangster film, mais d'une antipathie sympathique....'¹⁶ There are also spoken and visual references to Hawks's *Rio Bravo* within the film, which extend the allusions into the Western genre, and moreover to a film in which Martin again featured, and Michel Marie has highlighted in this connection Piccoli's recollection of Godard's written comments on his copy of the scenario about the conception of his character as being one from *Marienbad* who would have liked to be playing in *Rio Bravo*.

An alternative reading emerges, therefore, of the artist as a collaborator, a tormented soul who is not entirely revolted by fascistic male fantasies — as incarnated in the figure of Palance, simultaneously Hollywood star and fictitious producer of action movies, an icon of masculine power, freedom and individualism. Paul's crisis of identity is perhaps due to the extent to which he shares some of these things or desires them. We can almost see this spelt out iconographically in the way that the accoutrements of the Michel Poiccard stereotype — that male fantasy figure with which Godard started his oeuvre and with which he continued to be fascinated — are split between the producer and writer figures, with Prokosch having the trademark car and sunglasses, the arrogance and womanising, and Javal the hat, gun and romantic angst. The extent to which this dramatizes personal obsessions of his own is shown in the way Godard furnishes Piccoli's character with similar garb to himself, as well as his own cinematic tastes (Hawks, Ray, Minnelli, Lang, Rossellini), and includes autobiographical elements within the apartment (see Marie, 1990, p.77). Moreover, if we map onto the scenario the autobiographical conflict described above, where the producer figure represents the control of money and desire enjoyed in fantasy by the father or patriarch, then the writer and his dilemma concerning his own artistic prostitution can be seen as symbolizing the repression of these desires in Godard *film*. In line with this thematic, Godard's scenario assumes an even more archetypally Oedipal dimension than Moravia's story, through the killing off Prokosch (whereas Battista survives the car crash in the novel). I do not mean to propose that an unresolved Oedipal complex provides the entire key to understanding the complex thematic of this multilayered film, or of the director's oeuvre, but I would like to explore further some correspondences with Godard's ambivalent relationship to bourgeois society and its culture, as they are revealed through his attraction to and interaction with specific features and exemplars of the melodramatic mode of Hollywood cinema.

Doubles and Reversals

What I would first take to be significant and worthy of further examination are his recurrent portrayals of — and references to — the fragmentation or doubling of male identity. K. Jefferson Kline has highlighted some of these and relates them to what he calls 'French cinema's ongoing revolt against

the aesthetics of identity'.¹⁷ Comparing *A bout de souffle* and *Pierrot le fou*, Kline has analysed the increased modernist deconstruction of narrative and character in the later film, which, when taken together with the French literary intertexts he has identified in the script and scenario, support a stimulating argument that this all amounts to a self-conscious attempt at 'undoing' or 'screening out' the Americanness of the earlier film (associated, by the way, with its 'fascism'). I would argue that this thesis itself actually screens out the significance of the references to American cinema — particularly of Fuller (who appears within the film as a Godardian version of himself, like Lang in *Contempt*) and Ray, and the references to specific American literary texts such as Poe's story of the double, *William Wilson*. By focusing on the French texts and the 'revolutionary' effect of the stylistic disruption and modernist fragmentation of identity, Kline has ignored the extent to which these American sources were in themselves not only iconoclastic in relation to both form (studio conventions, censorship) and content (the ideology of American materialism and individualism), but also the fact that they were in the same business of portraying characters with fragmented or split personalities. For example, Kline makes passing reference to Belmondo's conversation with Devos at the end of *Pierrot*, where the musician is suffering from auditory hallucinations of music playing, snatches of which appear on the soundtrack, alternating with the silence the other hears. This I take to be a homage to Fuller's *Shock Corridor* (1963), a film in which a lunatic asylum is presented as a microcosm of American society and the hero succumbs to catatonic schizophrenia — and more specifically to the scene where Breck is serenaded by the deluded Pagliacci who hears his own full orchestral accompaniment, which alternates on the soundtrack with the silence perceived by his companion.

I refer to *Pierrot* here mainly to highlight the thematic continuity and close identity of the citations in the two films discussed by Kline with those of *Contempt* which stands mid way between them. What for me is significant in the thematic development and interrelationships of these three films is the fact that the progressive breakdown of character and identity portrayed within them repeatedly results from the rejection or betrayal of the male protagonist by strong, decisive or enigmatic women (Patricia, Camille, Marianne). These thematic links were acknowledged in a 1965 *Cahiers* interview, when discussing the indecisive and contemplative nature of Pierrot (Jean-Paul Belmondo) in the eponymous film, Godard said that the character was like Piccoli in *Contempt*.¹⁸ Thus there is a pattern of reversals of the active versus passive qualities normally coded as gender specific, i.e., masculine versus feminine. I want to consider how far these reversals can be read as operating as a doubling process. This thought seems to be present in Godard's own comments on *Contempt*, when, in discussing the final isolation of the characters on an island, he pointed to a literary source for his representation of 'shipwreck victims from a modern world landing on a mysterious island' in the works of Jules Verne, where he liked to think that 'you have the scientist, the child, and

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the captain, and that in my story you have the young wife, the adventurer, and the old man.¹⁹ In the Verne story referred to the child enlists these two contrasting archetypes of masculine enterprise, the active and the intellectual, in the quest for a lost father — a narrative replete with Freudian connotations of the 'family romance', a search for identity or origins. Surprisingly, Godard's formula leaves out the central male protagonist, or, rather offers the woman as his double, in the sense that she is positioned between two types of masculinity — the active adventurer and the contemplative intellectual, and the quest for identity is displaced onto her. This doubling is complete in *Pierrot*, as Godard acknowledged that here 'Anna represents the active life and Belmondo the contemplative' (Milne, 1986, p.219).

Such role reversals of the conventional male-active/female-passive dichotomy are a distinctive feature of the New Wave's representations of the modern couple, and I want to consider how far these gendered subjects can also be taken as doubles and how far their conflicted or fragmented identities can be seen as expressing specific social and sexual anxieties within what has been dubbed the modern crisis of masculinity, using these observations to cast further light on Godard's interest in certain Hollywood prototypes.

John Orr's observations on the topic of doubles are relevant here, in that he has argued that in cinema sexual boundaries are easily crossed, that the double can change gender,

and that 'In modern film the double's ubiquitous shadow usually signifies rebellion by the bourgeois hero against his middle-class role and its forms of sexual constraint.'²⁰ The self-consciousness of Godard's use of the double no doubt owes something to the influence of the cinematic theories of Edgar Morin, heavily influenced as they were by anthropology and gestalt psychology. In *Le cinéma ou L'Homme Imaginaire* (1956), Morin had discussed the image of the alter ego, other and superior, which has a magic force, and is a projection of our fears and desires, and which can simultaneously represent victory over death and death's victory. It was in this context that he discussed the modern demonising of the 'spectre boffmanesque' in *Dorian Gray*, and we have already noted Godard's attachment to such images of the decadence of the narcissistic romantic hero in Poe. John Orr sees the films of Resnais, Godard, Bergman, Bertolucci and Antonioni as presenting the modern bourgeois as the anti-heroic successor to the romantic hero of the 19th century melodrama, so that 'otherness becomes the scenario for the doubling of the split self and the crisis in bourgeois identity'. For the anthropo-

16 Marie, op.cit., p.74-5.

17 T. Jefferson Kline, *Screening the Text: Intertextuality in New Wave French Cinema*, Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1992.

18 Tom Milne, op.cit., p.219.

19 Royal S. Brown, ed., *Focus on Godard*, Eaglewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1972, pp.37-39.

20 John Orr, op.cit., pp. 35-58.

Left to right: Georgia Moll, Brigitte Bardot, Michel Piccoli, Jack Palance. Fritz Lang seated in foreground.



gist, therefore, doubles represent humanity's basic fears — intimations of mortality and the desire for immortality, and through their spectral and demonic manifestations, the moral and political battle between good and evil. In modern cinema and fiction, and in the cine-psychological and cultural criticism inspired by them, those fears have been largely internalized — the Other within rather than the threat from without — the economic, cultural and psychosexual conflicts of the bourgeois mind acted out on a widescreen. Orr, in describing this process, relates it to a single dominant fear:

Here the decentred self lives out less the threat to civilisation from the outside, more the contradiction between economic and cultural capital within, a conflict within the bourgeois culture... which is constant and unresolved. Here the dominant fear is the fear of being petrified into the fixed value of a commodity.²¹

Of course, the whole scenario of *Contempt* concerns the protagonist's fear of artistic prostitution and his parallel objectification of his wife, which seems to give rise to her discontent. This can no doubt be seen in part as a meditation upon Godard's earlier casting of his own wife, Anna Karina, to play a prostitute in *Vivre sa Vie*, an idea iconographically reinforced here by Bardot's wearing of a blonde wig for part of the film. But by her resistance to possible prostitution or seduction Camille can be identified with Paul's predicament, as part of his fragmented self, at the same time as operating as his persecuting demon or alter ego. Her materialistic demands can therefore also be seen as a projection of Paul's repressed ambitions to succeed, own property and enjoy the freedom or luxury of a bourgeois lifestyle. Camille's other side, her contempt, should perhaps be viewed in the context

not only of Godard's other films, but also in relation to the rest of the New Wave and their contemporaries, for, as Orr has argued, 'the new cinema is inseparable from its portrait of the 'new woman'', who shares in bourgeois prosperity but remains critical of bourgeois culture.'

Let us now examine what Orr seems to propose — that much of this portrayal of middle-class women's discontented sexuality is a result of the implosion of class power, and that its main motivation is the fear of being commodified. For it is here that the 'homosocial' male melodrama of class and masculine hierarchies (to which the Godardian gangster clothes, guns and cars all pay homage) meets and is undercut by the *femme fatale* — the female double, the active, liberated woman. Clearly, deep sexual fears and insecurities are entangled within the drama of class and cultural conflict that in these films takes us beyond the central fear proposed in Orr's thesis, which was that of the commodification of the individual subjectivity. These dramas of female mistrust and discontent and male rejection or emasculation focus attention upon a fear of something that is perhaps worse than the commodifying or objectifying of the individual subject. Orr analysed *La Notte*, a film with obvious affinities to Godard's — since the wife deserts her husband who is worrying about his artistic prostitution — and he identified a further malaise within the disintegration of the couple and their own self esteem that goes beyond the corruption or degradation of prostitution, namely that neither seems to feel they have anything to offer others.²² I would propose to complete this equation more specifically in relation to the study of Godardian male characters by the following formulation: if the self is (or is in danger of being) a commodified or classified object, then its

Some Came Running: Frank Sinatra, Shirley MacLaine, Dean Martin, Carmen Phillips



rejection implies not merely a loss of love or desirability, but means that as a commodity it is worthless, not valued, not marketable — beyond redemption. We referred earlier to MacCabe's distinction between legal and illegal money, the restrictions of the bourgeois social world and individual freedom in *Breathless*; in this reading, prostitution as opposed to legal ways of making money in *Vivre sa Vie* gave way by 1966's *Deux ou trois choses* to the view that the former is 'the exemplary relation to money in our society'.²³ Now, however, it is possible to tease out another aspect of the subject of money and its recurrence as a central theme of Godard's work and of many of the films which he admired. If we accept that part of the angst of the male characters is due to their commodification or virtual prostitution by existing within bourgeois society, and that their sexual relations involve a similar subjugation to the active power or look (whether of desire or contempt) of the Other, then they are caught in a double-bind, where self-respect and the desire or respect of the love-object eternally collide. Thus, if they accept or solicit money or love with conditions attached — like Godard as a boy with his pocket money — they lose their self-respect and inevitably earn the contempt of the social group, community, or love object.

Some Came Running and Rio Bravo

It is in the light of these observations that I want to argue for the centrality of Godard's Hollywood references, and while I believe this is equally true of many of the aesthetic and iconographic features of his films, I will confine myself here specifically to the structural and thematic elements we have been discussing so far. In both *Some Came Running* and *Rio Bravo*

Some Came Running: the writer and the whore

the question of money and how it is obtained or earned and used is central to the protagonist's fall and possible redemption, and his identity crisis is linked or attributed to his rejection by a woman — though in Hawks's movie, this had happened to Dude (Dean Martin) prior to the commencement of the film and explains his present condition as a destitute alcoholic.

Taking *Some Came Running* first, Godard's scripted references foreground the importance of the conception of the male characters — two tough guys, an alcoholic gambler, Bama Dillert (Martin), and an ex-GI and aspiring writer, Dave Hirsch (Sinatra), both of whom are undermined by fear of failure or rejection. Dillert's permanent hat-wearing, as copied by Godard's protagonist, was born out of a superstitious fear of failure. Dave Hirsch, meanwhile, is a 'sensitive' intellectual who reads Hemingway and Faulkner (he is seen unpacking books of theirs at the beginning of the film), but is afraid to send his own work to a publisher. This tough but sensitive writer figure is itself a reference to the tradition of hard-drinking, hard-living, anti-intellectual writers, like Hemingway and Faulkner, who had inspired or collaborated on Hollywood films themselves — including, of course, several by Howard Hawks. Godard's admiration for Faulkner was evident right from his first feature, which contained extensive references to *Wild Palms*, and Minnelli's film was an adaptation of a novel in the Faulknerian tradition by James Jones. The sensitivity of the writer in the American novel and its movie adaptation leaves him vulnerable to exposure and rejection, and open to suspicion or ridicule in a culture which values toughness and reticence in its manhood. A passage from Jones's novel, though not quoted in the film, and ostensibly about a minor character, Wally Dennis, who also has aspirations to be a writer, seems to encapsulate the performative nature of this culture of masculinity. Dave Hirsch, watching the young Wally with his long hair and cowboy boots in the local bar is caught thinking:

It was all right to be a writer. But you can't act like a writer. You must act like a regular guy. He thought Wally must be terribly tired and exhausted every time he got home, after he had been out where there were people.²⁴

If we bear in mind that Godard originally wanted Sinatra as the star of *Contempt*, the similarities with Javal's character and other thematic correspondences between the two films become clearer. Like Odysseus — in the film within the film — Hirsch returns to his home after many years of absence; like Javal (and Odysseus) he is rejected by the woman he loves; like Javal he is anxious about his writing and its purpose; and, like Javal he struggles to resist the corrupting, materialistic influence of a richer, more powerful man — his brother/ surrogate father.

In Minnelli's film Dave Hirsch is drawn to, and sets up house with an irresponsible alter ego, the gambler Bama Dillert. Their differing types of masculinity are differentiated

21 John Orr, op.cit., p.39.

22 John Orr, op.cit., 21-22.

23 Colin MacCabe, op.cit., p.38.

24 James Jones, *Some Came Running*, London: Panther, 1960, p.35.





Rio Bravo: Walter Brennan and John Wayne

through two types of money sources or career choices, in a similar fashion to those traced by MacCabe in early Godard running through the male/female couples. Thus Dillert's winnings, the ill-gotten gains of gambling, can be compared to Michel Poiccard's stolen money — it is easy money, a legitimized form of stealing in masculine culture, associated with instant gratification, freedom and danger. Attracted to Dillert and his lifestyle, Dave Hirsch is positioned between this easy money and the bankable bourgeois status and hypocritical respectability of his brother (who sent him to a children's home and now cheats on his wife). The film starts with him ostentatiously placing a money order in a rival bank to the one his brother is involved with — although it is later revealed that this money is not entirely respectable in origin, when he tells Dillert that it was the proceeds of gambling. He soon further states his independence — and his resentment at having been treated like a rejected commodity or unwanted expense — by offering his brother a cheque to cover his past expenses for the children's home.

A second 'respectable' source of money is offered to Dave in the scenario, namely the payment for publication of a story which he had previously discarded, and is persuaded by the

woman he has come to love, has some merit. The activity of writing itself, and the actual content of the story, expose his 'highly sensitive' nature (in the words applied to him by Gwen's father) and we assume that his reluctance to submit it to a wider public are due to his fear of rejection or ridicule, a conclusion made more certain by the knowledge that his first novel was, in Gwen's opinion, a 'study of rejection'. However, the fact that the acceptance and payment are mediated for him by a woman who is also a pillar of the local community and its values, and who ironically also rejects him with contempt (after the cheque has been handed over) because of his friends and their decadent or dissolute lives, illustrates that double bind I referred to earlier, a Faustian dilemma whereby soliciting love/bourgeois status and conformity involves emasculation for the man/ artist, which directly exposes him to further levels of humiliation through the rejection of this reduced, commodified object — the self/ the work, as unworthy or worthless.

There are many ways in which this film can itself be related to *Rio Bravo*. In spite of its surface depiction of the detail of small town bourgeois life, structurally and iconographically *Some Came Running* has many features of a Western — the wanderer coming into town, the protagonist's choice between schoolteacher and whore, the alcoholic/ gambler sidekick (and gambling and whisky as a real man's occupation), as well as a street brawl and a climactic shooting. But it

is ultimately in the depiction of the pain and despair of the rejected and self-destructive male protagonist that we can see the most direct relationship to Hawks's film, and their combined influence on Godard's conception of Paul Javal, the character from *Marienbad* who acts as if he were playing in *Rio Bravo*. It is no coincidence, I feel, that the latter film opens and centres around the decline and redemption of a character again played by Dean Martin. Dude is a self-destructive alcoholic, not unlike Bama Dillert, but he combines this with motivation that also reminds us of Dave Hirsch in Minnelli's film, since his is a condition arrived at after his rejection by a woman. Unlike Bama, however, Dude is hopelessly destitute and is prepared to degrade himself to obtain money for drinks by retrieving coins from a spittoon for the amusement of others. He later — as part of the process of rehabilitating himself — returns the compliment (like Dave Hirsch with his brother) by making his tormentor do the same thing. Money accepted with conditions attached is here again portrayed as a form of masculine humiliation, a sadomasochistic punishment.

Much critical comment has centred around the notion that this movie was made as a riposte to *High Noon*, with the sher-

iff (John Wayne) as the prime protagonist who needs and constantly gets offered assistance even when seeming to reject it, unlike Zinnemann's hero who is constantly seeking it and being rejected by the community. The fact that Wayne, the definitive Western star, plays the sheriff could account for some of the over-emphasising of the importance of his character. Hawks himself has said this is Dean Martin's story, which suggests that he considered the main point of the narrative the redemption of the weak and vulnerable Dude, which is far from the generic norm.²⁵ There are plenty of pointers to support this argument, not least the fact that the film opens with Dude's hesitant and self-effacing entry into the bar and closes with him confidently heading for the same bar (over which he had already taken command in the saloon incident mentioned above), alongside Chance's faithful deputy, Stumpy, the sheriff having relaxed into taking command of the domestic arena upstairs. In an earlier scene, as Deborah Thomas has observed, Chance was metaphorically 'disarmed' by his putting down the rifle he has carried everywhere to embrace Feathers (Angie Dickinson)²⁶ and in this final recapitulation of the same motif there is a clear impression of the retirement or displacement of the older man. If Wayne's character still has a residual function as the redeeming Westerner here, it is nevertheless highly significant in my view that it is not his familiar back we see walking away in the final frames, but the reformed Dude — a man previously rejected by his lover and regarded with contempt by his masculine peers.

The group that surrounds Wayne's paternal figure has been described in terms of a professional group, each with its individual talents which are employed as part of a job for which they earn payment (rather than volunteered purely through a commitment to law and justice).²⁷ In this way they are not unlike the film production communities we began by examining in the self-reflexive scenarios of Minnelli and Godard. However, they can also be seen to assume prototypical characteristics of members of a nuclear family. Stumpy, whose age and lameness make him less of a man, has a maternal function and womanish traits, remaining 'at home', cooking, keeping the place in order and worrying about the others in their forays into the outside world; Dude is treated as a wayward child or prodigal son; and a sibling style rivalry and affection is built up between him and Colorado. Chance's relationship with Feathers, which exactly parallels Dude's (she is a wayward child seeking approval and like Dude she gets foolishly drunk and gambles), is developed parallel to, but almost exclusive of this male family. Their interchangeability is marked in one scene, however, where she takes Dude's place (while he is held hostage), alongside Colorado when Chance is under attack — though she clearly remains within the domestic sphere, the hotel, from which she throws a flowerpot to distract the villains. This conflating or doubling of the male and female leads in relation to a pivotal male authority figure and the final separation off of the female into a couple with the latter, who is then removed from the scene, thus leaves Dude as a 'lone star' who ultimately finds salvation in his professional role or identity. This follows a similar formal structure to that found in *Contempt*, with the obvious difference that the redeeming

function of Chance is turned into a corrupting influence in the case of Prokosch — and that he and Camille are 'written out' by being killed off together (perhaps united more by their rejection of Paul than any regard for each other), rather than sidelined into a territory coded as heterosexual coupledom (though this territory does seem somehow to be located in Hawks's movie outside of marriage and domesticity, as Deborah Thomas has argued).

To briefly conclude this putative reading of the combined influences of these Hollywood films upon the thematic content of *Contempt*, I want to focus upon these parallel narrative structures and how they impact upon the resolution of the male protagonist's inner conflicts. No doubt the extent to which I relate them to Godard's own personal history will be debated and may need further detailed appraisal.. Having said that, it seems to me entirely possible that in his rejection by a woman with contempt and his ultimate single state, as the survivor of a doomed marriage, Javal's story could have some personal relevance to Godard's own personal life at the time. The point to recapitulate here, though, is that Javal's predicament in *Contempt* closely resembles that of Minnelli's protagonist at the close of *Some Came Running*. Here, in the funeral scene, however, Dave Hirsch, stands alone, his relations to others and the local community unresolved. At the end of Godard's *Contempt* Javal turns back towards the film community where Godard himself has taken command, as assistant director, a hint perhaps at the possibility of the artist still achieving something within a corrupting or oppressive system. And, in this sense, as we have seen, Hawks's protagonist in *Rio Bravo* also provides an object lesson in coping with such a rejection and surviving outside heterosexual or bourgeois coupledom. And there is also a sense in which the latter film simultaneously resolves an Oedipal conflict through Dude's assumption of the patriarchal role, brought about by redeeming himself through dedication to his work and achieving recognition and acceptance within a professional group. I am left wondering whether this is in fact the essence of the appeal of that 'Laramiesque dignity' that Godard found only in certain Hollywood representations of masculinity, a confident if bruised and tested figure no longer in thrall to the approval of a woman nor to a patriarchal authority figure. Though I recognize that there is much more work to be done in exploring and sustaining these conclusions, I hope I have at least presented sufficient evidence here to maintain my provisional argument for the absolute centrality of these Hollywood sources to the thematic content of *Contempt*.

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25 Peter Bogdanovich, 'Interview with Howard Hawks' in J. Hillier and P. Wollen, eds., *Howard Hawks, American Artist*, London: BFI, 1996, p.65.

26 Deborah Thomas, 'John Wayne's Body' in I. Cameron & D. Pye, eds., *The Movie Book of the Western*, London: Studio Vista, 1996, pp.75-87.

27 Will Wright, *Six Guns and Society: A Structural Study of the Western*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975.

by Izzy Greenberg

Cahiers de Rossellini

You don't think much of Rossellini; you don't, so you tell me, like *Viaggio in Italia*; and everything seems to be in order. But no; you are not assured enough in your rejection not to sound out the opinion of Rossellinians. They provoke you, worry you, as if you weren't quite easy in your mind about your taste. What a curious attitude!¹

So opens Jacques Rivette's "Lettre sur Rossellini," published in 1955 in *Cahiers du Cinéma*. As he implies, the release of Roberto Rossellini's *Viaggio in Italia* in 1953 sparked an intense debate regarding the future of neorealism, as well as the future of film art in general. Much was said and written condemning Rossellini's latest work, mainly for its departure from neorealist tradition, but it was his supporters who understood the immense significance of *Viaggio in Italia* and the pivotal role it would play in the development and perception of cinema thereafter. Especially unrelenting in their support were the French film critics, and future New Wave filmmakers, of *Cahiers du Cinéma*. The question is, what prompted their tremendous outpouring of support and praise for the film, while others accused Rossellini of insincerity and incoherence, and, furthermore, why did they hail the film as a cinematic and artistic intellectual masterpiece that would change the future of filmmaking? In examining articles on and interviews with Rossellini that were published in *Cahiers* in the 1950s by Eric Rohmer (a.k.a. Maurice Schérer), Francois Truffaut, Jacques Rivette and others, it becomes evident that the answer lies in Rossellini's modified approach to cinema. This modified approach remains tied, like his early neorealism, to the environment that surrounds him. However, now Rossellini has become more idiosyncratic, more psychological and more personal, resulting in a deeper and more profound form of realism. The *Cahiers* writers saw in *Viaggio in Italia* a new form which provided the freedom for intellectual filmmaking to explore new, complex issues, and that this freedom could bring about the liberation of cinema as a whole.

The neorealism which began with Visconti's *Ossessione* (1943) and gained recognition with Rossellini's *Roma, città aperta* (1945), was, essentially, a reaction against the superficiality and falsehood inherent in most Italian and world cinema in the pre-war period. Originally, it was Zavattini who demanded a new Italian cinema that would reject fabricated narratives and professional actors in order to reveal, "the reality buried under the myths."² In describing what he felt was

missing in Italian cinema in 1943, Umberto Barbaro coined the term "neorealism", a reference to the French poetic realism of the 1930s, evident in the films of Renoir, Carne, Duvivier and Clair.³ Especially influential was Renoir's *Toni* (1934), a film about immigrant labourers, which was shot on location using non-professional actors. The neorealist movement was also heavily influenced by Marxist ideology and Soviet cinema, in that many of those involved were covert Marxists whose social and political motivations were thematically inherent in their films.

In setting out the guidelines in the early issues of *Cahiers* (est. 1951), there are two basic principles that summarize the progression which the writers sought for cinema. The first principle, one that emerges from the writings of André Bazin, the founder of *Cahiers*, is a shift of emphasis from montage to *mise-en-scène*; from juxtaposition of shots to juxtaposition of the elements within the shot. The motivation for this shift is that film should allow for emotional and psychological experience to permeate as much as rational intellect does. The second principle, the auteur theory, is one that involves the filmmaker personally; that, as an artistic medium, film is a forum for personal artistic expression of the artist's vision. Stemming from this is the challenge to the commercial nature of postwar films, both in France and the US, that placed excess emphasis on plot and dialogue.⁴

Rossellini's modified brand of realism, manifest in *Viaggio in Italia* and hinted at earlier in *Stromboli* (1949) and *Europa '51* (1952), is concerned more with personal reality than with the quest for an exact representation of social and political reality as expressed by himself and other early neorealists. The new films generally dealt with examinations of relationships,

1 Jacques Rivette, "Lettre sur Rossellini." *Cahiers du Cinéma* vol.46, April 1955. (trans. Tom Milne) in *Cahiers du Cinéma: The 1950's*. Jim Hillier, ed. Routledge & Kegan Paul: London, 1985. p. 192.

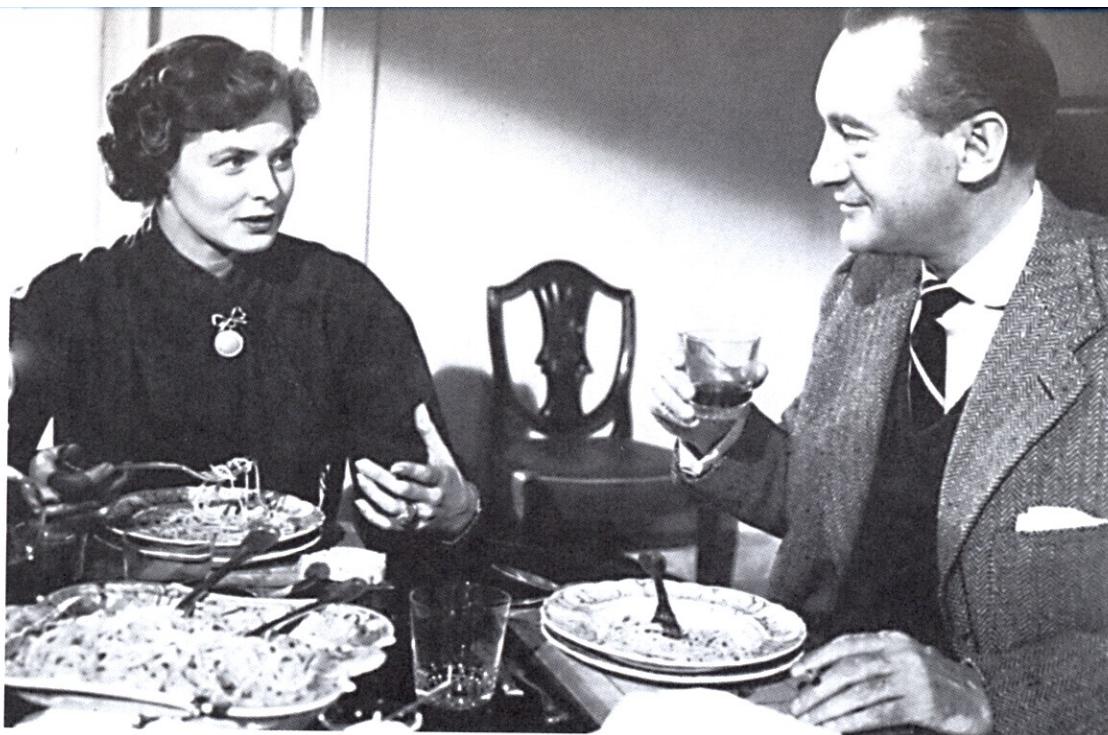
2 David A. Cook, *A History of Narrative Film* 3rd edition. W. W. Norton and Company: New York, 1996. p. 425.

3 Cook, p. 425.

4 Cook, p. 529.

Stromboli (1949), the first of the Rossellini-Bergman films.





LEFT: *Viaggio in Italia* (1953)

RIGHT: *La Paura* (1954), the final Rossellini-Bergman collaboration.

emotional alienation and personal despair, which replaced subjects related to politics, war and oppression. *Viaggio in Italia* is a slice of life that mirrors the environment in which it was made, commenting subtly as it proceeds to deconstruct the psychological and existential woes of its characters, Alex and Katherine Joyce (played by George Sanders and Ingrid Bergman). The film enters the English couple's lives as they are driving to Naples to procure the sale of Uncle Homer's villa. Already, the literary references are planted by the allusion to Homer, as well as several references to Joyce, on whose *The Dead* Rossellini's film is partially based. The viewer is forced to endure the emotional, psychological and sexual rift that is evident between husband and wife — moments so awkward that one cannot help but feel intrusive. It is from the relationship between the two protagonists, and the influence that their environment exerts upon them, that meaning is derived. The outside world that Alex and Katherine experience in and around Naples functions, in a psychological way, as a third protagonist.

Specifically, it is in the manner and style by which Rossellini portrays these interactions, more so than the subjects he tackles, that is unique. The key to the new style is, Peter Bondanella writes, "Rossellini's impassivity, his technique of revealing only the outer surfaces of reality, forcing the viewer to confront his seemingly inconsequential and undramatic style without obvious clues as to how the film must be interpreted."⁵ As Rossellini himself states:

I always try to be impassive. I find whatever is astonishing, unusual and moving in men, it is precisely that great actions and great deeds come about in the same way, with the same resonance, as normal everyday occurrences. I try to relate both with the same humility....⁶

With *Viaggio in Italia*, Rossellini departs from the heavily moralistic and dialectical nature of his earlier work as a neorealist master, leaving much of the interpretive work up to the viewer. The relative banality and simplicity of the images, coupled with his use of long, slow-paced shots, and the unusual composition of those shots, manage to convey a unique sense of both intellectual and emotional profundity. It is these very elements, the slow, long take and the unusual composition, that feed the deliberate, contemplative nature of the film. Scenes depicting Katherine's journeys through Naples offer the best examples of this technique and its effect. When she takes her first drive through the city, and especially when she tours the museum, the film captures her *responses* to the surroundings more so than what she is looking at (unless it is directly relevant). What is important is not the actual physical landscape, but Katherine's perception of it: her "mental landscape" in Bazin's words.⁷ Thus, by seeing her reactions to the explicit sexuality of the marble statues in the museum, the viewer can make confident assumptions about Katherine's sexual frustrations.

In this sense, it can be said that *Viaggio in Italia* is more real than any of Rossellini's previous neorealist films, inasmuch as it fulfills Zavattini's precept that called for cinema to penetrate the distracting superficialities and uncover the reality behind them. But Rossellini goes beyond this; he transcends the traditions of signifier and signified, and that of early neorealism, by forcing the viewer to search for significance beyond the images presented on the screen. He also plays with the perception of what is subjective and what is objective, blurring them by presenting subjectivity in a relatively objective manner. The result is a deep, psychologically analytical drama, in which the mundane life and problems of a troubled married couple take precedence, rather than the socially and politically motivated subjects of Rossellini's earlier films.

Many critics and filmmakers saw this departure, this modified form of realism, as a betrayal of the neorealist ideal that seeks a populist cinema concerned primarily with socio-political change. His use of professional actors angered many hardcore neorealists, for they did not appreciate that only a professional actor had the training necessary to tackle — to *realistically* tackle — the complicated, psychologically intense themes he wished to express. Rossellini went to great lengths to elicit the proper performances from Sanders and Bergman; he withheld specific script and dialogue information until the night before shooting the scene, driving his actors mad to the point that they felt as frustrated and lost as Rossellini wanted their characters to feel. However, many still felt that he was abandoning the ideals that were at the core of neorealism. In an interview with Rohmer, Rossellini explains himself:

In my opinion... there is no break at all [from the neorealist tradition]. I think I am the same human being looking at things in the same way. But one is moved to take up other themes, interest is shifted somewhere else, you have to take other paths; you cannot go on shooting in ruined cities for ever. Too often we make the mistake of letting ourselves be hypnotized by a particular milieu, by the feel of particular time. But life has changed....⁸

Without changing the quintessential tenets of his filmmaking theory, Rossellini has molded the neorealist approach to cinema into a style that transcends the barrier of the concrete world to include the intellectual, emotional and spiritual realms of existence. In so doing, Rossellini defies the cinematic tradition of the structured narrative by making a film that has no real beginning or end — it is a temporal sketch in which the narrative is secondary. The purpose is not for the scenario to hit the viewer over the head, but for the images themselves to speak the true meaning of the film. This point is illustrated beautifully by Rivette in his comparison between Rossellini and the French artist Henri Matisse:

Matisse and Rossellini affirm the freedom of the artist, but do not misunderstand me: a controlled, constructed freedom, where the initial building finally disappears beneath the sketch... A sketch more accurate, more detailed than any detail and the most scrupulous design, a disposition of forces more accurate than composition, these are the sort of miracles from which springs the sovereign truth of the imagination....⁹

Rossellini's earlier films are, like most ideologically driven forces, constrained by the times and events which orchestrated their birth. "The cinema," Zavattini writes, "should accept,



unconditionally, what is contemporary. *Today, today, today.*"¹⁰ Life, however, always remains life; a story that deals with the existential struggle of everyday life will always be relevant, and never be constrained by temporal and spatial (i.e. historical) factors. In *Viaggio in Italia*, Rossellini is no longer trying to prove anything through the narrative of his heroes, but through their actions alone meaning is derived. For Rossellini, writes Rivette, "dialectic is a whore who sleeps with all odds and ends of thought, and offers herself to any sophism; and dialecticians are riff-raff. His heroes prove nothing, they act."¹¹

Inherent in his approach is a careful and deliberate sense of construction that results in an elevated artistic film form that is, for the most part, absent in cinema. It is the lack of a true organizational element that has, according to Rivette, condemned cinema to the narrative. By rejecting the narrative, Rossellini offers cinema a more organized, essay-like form for film construction, the basis of which remains life itself. The writers of *Cahiers* saw the possibilities that became available as a result of *Viaggio in Italia*, as Rivette writes:

How could one fail suddenly to recognize, quintessentially sketched, ill-composed, incomplete, the semblance of our daily existence? These arbitrary groups, these absolutely theoretical collections of people eaten away by lassitude and

5 Peter Bondanella, *Italian Cinema from Neorealism to the Present*. 2nd Ed. The Continuum Publishing Company: New York, 1983. p. 107.

6 Eric Rohmer and Francois Truffaut, "Interview with Roberto Rossellini." *Cahiers du Cinéma* vol.37, July 1954 (trans. Liz Heron) in *Cahiers du Cinéma: The 1950's*. Jim Hillier, ed. Routledge & Kegan Paul: London, 1985. p. 210.

7 André Bazin. *What is Cinema* vol.2 p.98.

8 Rohmer and Truffaut, p. 209.

9 Rivette, p. 195.

10 Cook, p. 425. Quoting Cesare Zavattini, *Sequences From a Cinematic Life* (trans. William Weaver). Prentice Hall: Englewood Cliffs, 1970.

11 Rivette, p. 199.

boredom, exactly as we know them to be, as the irrefutable, accusing image of our heteroclite, dissident, discordant societies.¹²

If one looks beyond the seemingly mundane activities that are depicted in the film, one invariably sees that there are more profound elements at work: as Katherine and Alex are on their way to Italy, they drive past a fork in the road in the center of which stands a cross, symbolic of their crossing into the more mystical, supernatural environment of Naples and Neapolitan Italy, and dramatizing the significance of this crossing; in Naples, the statues are representative of beauty; the lovers of love; the pregnant women of maternity; the corpses of death; the religious ceremony that serves as the film's finale is representative of God.¹³ These references, placed so meticulously throughout the film, add a unique literary, poetic quality to the film, and are so subtle that one cannot possibly be more than subconsciously cognizant of them on a first viewing, if at all. When one distinguishes them, one comes to realize that Rossellini is not a mere voyeur, but a "seer," in Rivette's words; a filmmaker who has the ability to see beyond and through things and perceive their ideal forms - a Platonic filmmaker, if you will.¹⁴

The writers of *Cahiers* saw in *Viaggio in Italia* a film and a filmmaker very similar, if not synonymous, to what they hoped to achieve; the film fulfills the basic principles of what would soon become the tenets of the New Wave. Godard even went as far as to have his characters watch *Viaggio in Italia* in *Contempt*. It is curious that *Viaggio in Italia*, like some of Rossellini's earlier films, was not immediately recognized as the breakthrough that it is by others, particularly his fellow neorealists. His seeming departure is not really a departure at all, but an extension of the same basic principles to which virtually all his Italian contemporaries adhered. Why was the initial reception of the film so unfavorable, especially considering that within ten years virtually all film critics and filmmakers had come to accept the film as one of the most important ever made?

Rossellini struggles to offer some explanation: "Is it because I handle subjects that the cinema won't usually approach, or because I use a style that is not cinematographic? It is not the usual language; I refuse effects, I 'feel my way' in what I think is a very personal style."¹⁵ Rossellini also suggests that the delay in accepting his new approach has something to do with a delay that it often inherent in the acceptance of new ideas, one which he cannot comprehend. It is the price he paid for continuously working ahead, for being at the forefront, for being what Rivette calls, "the most modern of film-makers." He goes on to say that, "With the appearance of *Viaggio in Italia*, all films have suddenly aged ten years; nothing is more pitiless than youth, than this unequivocal intrusion by modern cinema, in which we can at last recognize what we were vaguely awaiting."¹⁶ Rivette also echoes Rossellini's opinion that it is the personal nature and subject of the film that lends itself to negative criticism; that Rossellini "dares" to speak about himself, about life.¹⁷ One undeniably sees clear motivations from Rossellini's personal experiences and feelings in his films, especially the evidence of his tumultuous marriage to Bergman,

which was falling apart at the time. There were many who considered such immodesty to be scandalous, and perhaps this is why it took some time before people were able to accept the film. Rohmer suggests that the lack of acceptance is due to Rossellini's style. The actors in *Viaggio in Italia* do not act per se - they act like normal people; instead of acting, they react to the stimuli that Rossellini provides in a nonchalant, melancholic way that is more powerful than any melodrama simply because it is true to life.¹⁸ This, along with the deliberate style (the long, slow takes), beckons the viewer to look deeply into the film in order to uncover its true meaning. It is perhaps this true meaning, this very Nietzschean understanding, that nobody wished to acknowledge.

The desire not to tamper with events, not to inject anything excessive into the narrative, but to let the images alone speak the meaning of the film stems from Rossellini's early neorealism. However, the stylistic changes his film form underwent with the emergence of *Viaggio in Italia* leads to a fundamental ambiguity. This ambiguous quality of the film that leaves it open to broad interpretation also brings about its defiance of definition; *Viaggio in Italia* is at the same time fiction and documentary, and at the same time neither fiction nor documentary. "It is a fusion," writes Robin Wood, "possible only in the cinema."¹⁹ But this ambiguity is not merely aesthetic, in that Rossellini sees neorealism as a moral position and a state of mind that is expressed aesthetically.²⁰ That this moral basis remains inherent in *Viaggio in Italia* despite its aesthetic developments affirms Rossellini's genius as a filmmaker - a genius that the writers of *Cahiers* recognized, and one that is strikingly similar to what they were trying to achieve. Heidegger says that, "a description of existence always and necessarily confirms the idea one has of it." Rossellini continued, as he did in his earlier films, to represent the reality that he felt was present in Italian life and in his own life. When this reality changed, Rossellini had the discernment to modify his filmmaking to a form which would best express the new concerns that were emerging, opening the door for many future filmmakers who would inherit his theoretical and stylistic innovations, most directly Antonioni and Fellini. It was for this discernment that he was praised by the writers of *Cahiers*, condemned by almost everyone else, and immortalized as a filmmaker forever.

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12 Rivette, p. 199.

13 Rivette, p. 199.

14 Rivette, p. 198.

15 Rohmer and Truffaut, p. 211.

16 Rivette, p. 202.

17 Rivette, p. 196.

18 Eric Rohmer, "La Terre du Miracle." *Cahiers du Cinéma* vol.47, May 1955. (trans. Liz Heron) in in *Cahiers du Cinéma: The 1950's*. Jim Hillier, ed. Routelage & Kegan Paul: London, 1985. p. 206.

19 Robin Wood, "Rossellini" in *Film Content*, vol.10, no.4 (July-August, 1974). p. 10.

20 Amedee Ayfre, "Néo Réalisme et Phénoménologie." *Cahiers du Cinéma* vol.17, November 1952. (trans. Diana Matias) in in *Cahiers du Cinéma: The 1950's*. Jim Hillier, ed. Routelage & Kegan Paul: London, 1985. p. 189.

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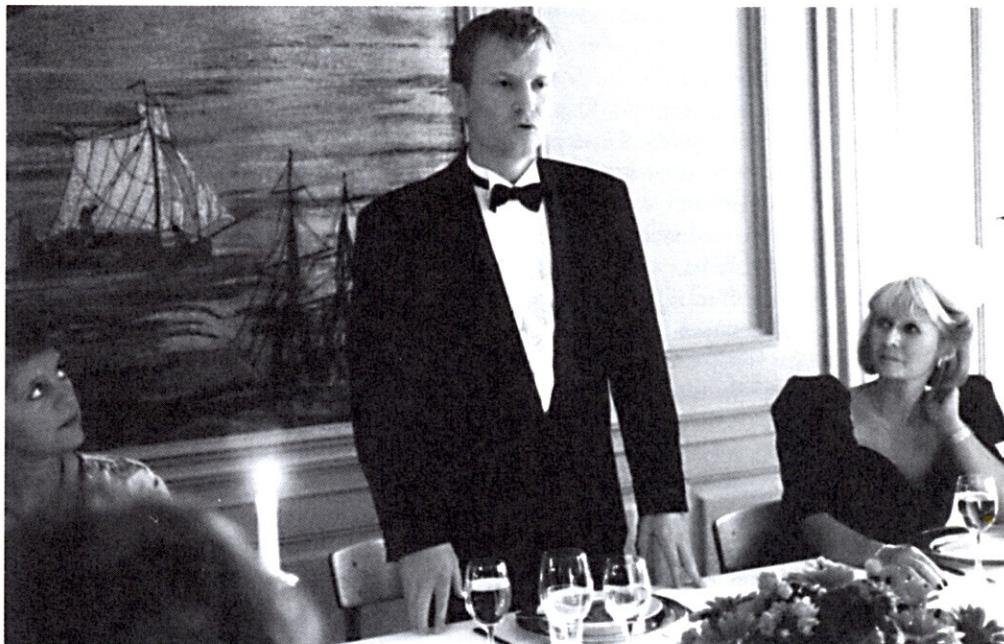
Humble Guests at the Celebration

An Interview with
Thomas Vinterberg
and Ulrich Thomsen

by Robin Wood

Introduction

Of the fifteen films I saw in the Toronto festival I have chosen to write on three of the four I most loved and admired. The fourth, *Flowers of Shanghai*, the latest masterpiece of Hou Hsiao-Hsien, is too complex and demanding to be discussed responsibly after only one viewing (and when can we expect a second opportunity?). I am convinced that Hou is one of cinema's major figures, comparable to, for example, Mizoguchi, Ophuls or Renoir, but not one of his



Ulrich Thomsen in Thomas Vinterberg's *The Celebration*

many films is currently available in North America).

While considering what to say about *The Celebration*, *The Hole* and *The Apple*, and working in the context of an issue whose main theme is the New Wave and its legacy, I was greatly struck by an apparent common debt (the only thing, apart from excellence, that the three films share): would any of them have been quite what they are if the New Wave had not existed? Thomas Vinterberg's stunning film, produced

within (just about!) the guidelines of *Dogma 95*¹, offers particularly interesting parallels with the New Wave's genesis, a striking case of history repeating itself. In essentials, *Dogma 95* is less important for its actual demands (which, as Vinterberg agrees, could easily become repressive if adhered to literally) than for its assault upon the conventions of contemporary mainstream cinema and its corresponding demand for a new freedom. Does this not instantly evoke both the tone and the

(1). *Dogma 95* is a manifesto produced by a film collective founded in Copenhagen 'to counter certain tendencies in film today'. Most relevant here is the 'Vow of Chastity', initially taken by Lars von Trier and Thomas Vinterberg and reproduced here from Odeon Films' press release:

I swear to submit to the following set of rules drawn up and confirmed by *Dogma 95*:

1. Shooting must be done on location. Props and sets must not be brought in. (If a particular prop is necessary to the story, a location must be chosen where this prop is to be found).

2. The sound must never be produced apart from the images or vice versa. (Music must not be used unless it occurs where the scene is being shot).

3. The camera must be hand-held. Any movement or immobil-

ity attainable in the hand is permitted. (The film must not take place where the camera is standing; shooting must take place where the film takes place).

4. The film must be in colour. Special lighting is not acceptable. (If there is too little light for exposure, the scene must be cut or a single lamp be attached to the camera).

5. Optical work and filters are forbidden.

6. The film must not contain superficial action. (Murders, weapons, etc., must not occur).

7. Temporal and geographical alienation are forbidden. (That is to say that the film takes place here and now).

8. Genre movies are not acceptable.

9. The film format must be Academy 35mm.

10. The director must not be credited.

specific focus of the manifestos, the 'agitprop', of the critics of *Cahiers du Cinéma* in the late 50s who subsequently became known worldwide as Truffaut, Chabrol, Godard, Rivette... — their demands as critics made flesh in the early films, on the cusp of the 50s/60s? We must hope that *The Celebration* represents the beginning of a Danish New Wave, its *400 Coups*, its *A Bout de Souffle*. It is quite unlike either, but it has grown out of a similar impulse to rebel against the dominant tendencies of the cinematic Establishment. Appropriately, the theme of the film is liberation, and the notion of liberation is enacted throughout in its style, its pervasive sense of freshness, of excitement, of challenge. It must be added, however, that the situation today is very much worse, the enemies of liberation far more powerful. In a world in which global corporate capitalism, in all its quasi-totalitarian brutality, controls, not just cinema, but every other aspect of our lives, any celebration must be tentative and muted.

We live in an age in which the concept of 'family values' is at last in question, together (inevitably) with the concept of 'family' itself. It seems to me no longer a 'given' that: (a) the family should necessarily be the nucleus of social organization; (b) children should be raised by their biological parents; and (c) the most fulfilling form of relationship is the family's basis and mainstay, the (nominally) monogamous heterosexual couple. The proposition that our traditional model, the patriarchal nuclear family, has been by now thoroughly discredited (even as it still drags doggedly on, from habit or inertia) seems to me no longer disputable. The vast and difficult question of our culture is, What is to replace it? Hopefully not another 'model', misperceived as 'natural' when it is merely 'normal'. But it remains to be seen what disparate forms of social organization are workable and practical and capable of coexisting. Numerous recent films (and indeed films from the past — *The Reckless Moment* springs to mind) have

raised this question implicitly, but none more eloquently or passionately or urgently than Thomas Vinterberg's *Festen* (*The Celebration*). None (and *The Celebration* must be included in this) has so far attempted more than a very tentative answer. What, for example, exactly are the implications of the two sisters walking off together at the end of *The Daytrippers*?

It is obvious that the power structures that pervade and define our culture have their origin within the structures of the patriarchal family; it follows that there can be no effective or lasting transformation of our culture's social/political structures that is not preceded or accompanied by the transformation of the family. Yet for anyone seriously committed to the ideal of a civilization freed from the principle of domination, the notion of 'family' (any form of family) presents problems that must appear daunting to the point of insuperable. It is by no means merely a matter of tackling the more obvious forms of child abuse —

The guilty father (Henning Moritzen) and the less-than-innocent mother (Berthe Neumann) react to the 'celebratory' revelations.



sexual, physical — though even those will remain difficult to eliminate while society continues to believe in the family's right to privacy and the child's non-right to report instances of abuse. If a man strikes me in the street I can instantly summon a policeman and have him prosecuted; if a father strikes his child within the 'privacy' of the home, the child (although vastly more vulnerable than myself) has no such recourse, since even were the option legally available the child would not be aware that it exists. There is also psychological abuse, far harder to prove or legislate against, often taking extremely subtle, almost subliminal, forms (isn't lying to children a form of abuse?), 'love' being the most effective cover. But beyond the question of abuse, there is the problem of indoctrination. How could one legislate against the common — perhaps ubiquitous — tendency of parents to consciously or unconsciously indoctrinate their children with their own set of values, moulding them in their image — as opposed to simply making those values available, 'presenting' them in the Brechtian sense, as an option, open to criticism or rejection, with alternative sets of values available? How, indeed, does one legislate against such indoctrination occurring in schools, as of course it does pervasively and continuously, our education system being, like the media, another tool of capitalism dedicated to the preservation of the hegemony? Ultimately, all one can do is make available to children the widest possible range of experiences, ideas and values, always of course taking into account their age, their capacity for understanding, response and thought. In such a process interaction with their peers will be of the utmost importance, far beyond any 'teaching' from adults. It is impossible that such an ideal could be achieved within the biological family *as we know it*, with its inherent tendencies to possessiveness ('my children') and domination ('this is the way to behave, *these* are the things to think, *these* are the values to live by...') endlessly reproduced by the repressions, frustrations and aggressions that inevitably characterize the 'nuclear' model.

The director and lead actor of *The*

Celebration still (on the evidence of the interview) believe that the continuation of the family, more or less in the form in which we know it but appropriately liberalized, is inevitable, and of course they are right for the foreseeable future. But I am more interested in the unforeseeable future, the future I shall not live to see (and which may never come into being since 'advanced' patriarchal capitalism appears to be singlemindedly dedicated to the destruction of life on the planet). It is clearly impossible for many reasons (practical, economic, psychological...) for an existing family abruptly to disband itself — even the question of the ways in which accommodation is organized under patriarchal capitalism would be a major impediment. But it should be possible for us to accept (however reluctantly and provisionally) what we have, making the most of a very bad job, yet simultaneously working and thinking toward a very different future. I also feel that their magnificent film is more radical, more drastic, more urgent in its implications than they consciously realize. It seems legitimate (perhaps in excess of their intentions) to read it symbolically: the overthrow of patriarchy, permitting the tentative formation of forms of relating freed from domination. Its tentative nature is not a weakness: if patriarchy were officially overthrown tomorrow, it would still take several generations for the insidiously pervasive habits of domination to wear themselves out and for alternatives to be firmly established on deeper levels than those of conscious good intentions.

The Interview

I have generally been wary of interviews because I always feel so insignificant in confronting filmmakers I admire (what right have *I* to take up their time?). In this instance I was put at my ease instantly: Thomas Vinterberg, twenty-nine but he could easily pass for twenty-two, walked in with his lead actor Ulrich Thomsen, a broad smile on his face: 'Hi, I'm Thomas, this is Ulrich'. I knew at once that I had nothing to worry about: I could say anything, and he wouldn't react with 'End of interview,' and walk out. So we had a relaxed but quite prob-

ing conversation, in circumstances that in general seem doomed to selfconsciousness. Thomas's English is near flawless; I tidied up one or two phrases in the interest of clarity, I hope without distorting the sense. The one passage I have omitted concerns his reaction to my revelation that Gbatokai Dakinah, despite the importance of his role in the film, is nowhere mentioned (either as actor or character) in either the press release or the festival catalogue. Although I can offer no other explanation for this (actors with less prominent roles are identified), I am reluctant to believe that the omission was racially motivated (Thomas used the word 'fascist') in a country that prides itself on its multiculturalism.

Having seen the film a second time since the interview, I have one regret. My tribute to Christian's heroism is altogether too simple, and requires modification. That it is presented, unambiguously, as admirable seems to me beyond dispute, its nature defined by the scene near the end of the film, at the point at which the reality of the abuse has been thoroughly confirmed, where Christian's younger brother Michael violently beats their father. Michael's action, though understandable, is not heroic in the least: it is motivated merely by the impotent rage of a man who realizes that he has been cheated, and misled into taking the wrong side. Vinterberg's explicit rejection of *physical* violence (in the interview) is thoroughly vindicated within the film. But the film shows that Christian's tenacity is sus-



Thomas Vinterberg

tained by the support of the servants, without which he would have made his first devastating denunciation (quite calmly, almost as an aside, as part of a formal toast to his father), and left, permitting the family and guests to treat it as some kind of sick joke. This detracts little from the heroism, beyond showing that even a hero needs support. But what it points to is of great significance in the film, and makes sense of both Christian's proposal to the servant Pia and the acceptance of Gbatokai as a member of the new, reconstructed, extended family of the film's conclusion: the demolition of bourgeois patriarchy facilitates the collapse of class and race divisions, preparing the way for the formation, at least in embryo, of a society not built on the domination principle. It is also fitting that the ultimate, and clinching, revelations come not from a man but from a collusion of the women whom patriarchy has previously kept divided: it is Pia the servant who retrieves Linda's suicide letter from the tube in which Helene has secreted it in her misguided attempt at preserving family unity, and it is Helene who then reads it aloud to the assembled guests.

Robin Wood: I wondered if we could begin by discussing *Dogma 95*? You talked of this [in the press release] as being a lot of fun, and I wonder whether it's intended more as provocation and protest against the current state of film, in which case I think it's immensely valuable, rather than as some rigid artistic testament. How strict is it supposed to be?

Thomas Vinterberg: I think the *Dogma* is in the area between a very solemn thing and deep irony...

RW: Yes, that's what I figured.

TV: ...and to be more specific than that is difficult. The whole idea of it was actually to us when we did it very obvious, because there's an artistic satisfaction to work within a frame, which I think is obvious, and to work against obstacles always creates...makes something grow, so if you see it logically, from an artistic point of view it is the most liberating thing you can do, to make such a tiny frame. We also wanted to break with the convention of filmmaking, first of all with the convention within our own filmmaking — force ourselves to try something new, due to the fact that there should be some sort of risk connected to making art. So from that aspect it's very solemn, and not rigid. On the other hand it is a game, as it's defined in the manifesto, which is a bit arrogant, of course very ironic also. It creates the atmosphere of playing. I think that was the atmosphere that spread out through the shooting and especially also when you did the script and the editing, a game where you're not allowed to put nondiegetic music, so if you're tempted to play with it, then you're tempted to make everybody sing. That's the 'play' kind of atmosphere, if you understand.

RW: I loved your terrible confessions², they're very funny.

TV: Yes, yes, I'm glad you liked them.

RW: Thinking specifically of your own film, *Festen*. You say that *Dogma 95* signatories are not supposed to make genre films, but isn't the 'family drama' a genre of very long standing?

TV: Uhhmm... I'm afraid you're right. We failed on that one. We tried not to be enclosed by the genre, and we tried to create a story without thinking about it... A genre film meant to us more like a film that is distant from our life, like science fiction.

RW: I would see *The Celebration* as enormously expanding that genre, pushing its boundaries very, very far...

TV: Oh, I'm glad. So we brought something to it.

RW: Another condition seems to be that no props are to be brought into the location. But you bring the actors in — they don't belong there, they don't live there. If you can bring the actors in, why can't you bring in props?

TV: (to Ulrich Thomsen): Do you consider yourself as a prop?

(Laughter).

Ulrich Thomsen: I'm very offended.

RW: No, no, I wasn't thinking of you at all as a prop...

UT (goodhumouredly): I think you did.

RW: No, no, I didn't mean that actors were props, not at all. All I meant was that the principle seems to be that everything must be real within that location, and the actors are still being brought in, they're not real, not real people...

UT: You're touching a soft spot.

TV: We're not doing a documentary...

RW: Exactly...

TV: So, it's limited how close you can come to truth — as it says in the manifesto we're trying to undress the film. But still, we have taste. We did a script, we made a selection of actors, our fantasy created the lines and stuff like that, so

2. Thomas's 'Confession' of 'transgressions' is also quoted here from the press release:

- I confess to having made one take with a black drape covering a window. This is not only the addition of a property, but must also be regarded as a kind of lighting arrangement.
- I confess to having knowledge of a pay rise that served as cover for the purchase of Thomas Bo Larsen's suit for use in the film.
- Similarly, I confess to having knowledge of purchases by Trine Dyrholm and Therese Glahn of the same nature.
- I confess to having set in train the construction of a non-exis-

tent hotel reception desk for use in *The Celebration*. It should be noted that the structure consisted solely of components already present at the location.

• I confess that Christian's mobile or cellular telephone was not his own. But it was present at the location.

• I confess that in one take the camera was attached to a microphone boom and thus only partially hand-held.

I hereby declare that the rest of *The Celebration* was produced in accordance with The Vow of Chastity.

*Pleading for absolution, I remain,
Thomas Vinterberg.*

it still is fiction and a part of that is of course the actors. But I think the actors, especially if they're good, are brought up to bring us closer to the truth, and to express... to be a medium... for true stories.

RW: Yes, but this 'truth' is necessarily the construct of the filmmakers.

TV: I didn't get that one, I'm sorry...

RW: The truth that you're talking about, the truth that emerges from the film, has been constructed by the filmmakers...

TV: Exactly. I think 'truth' is a very big word, and a bit empty. But I think the idea of it was to avoid the layers that the *auteur* can make between what's happening on the stage or on the screen, and the audience. To take away the makeup and register what is happening among these people. But of course the situation is invented, it's not a documentary. So it is very difficult, again, to define what kind of truth this is. And I can't bring you closer.

UT: It's a truth within the fiction.

RW: The truth that emerges out of the fiction, which is not necessarily absolute truth.

TV: It can not be. But also, when you read the manifesto, it says that we are not allowed to have any taste, and I guess the first choice you do, the first selection of an actor for instance, you have a taste, you can't avoid it, it's made out of rubber. But we have treated it as intentions, and visions, so that it has been at the back of our heads all through the shooting. We talked about that all the time, and I tried to avoid being too much involved in what was happening, and I didn't succeed. I was interrupting all the time.

RW: Yes, I'm afraid I can't help regarding you as an 'artist' and *The Celebration* as a 'work'.

TV: And so far... not that I have not experienced anything like that in making films, yet this is the most personal film I have made. But I don't think that's wrong...

RW: No, I don't either...

TV: What we're talking about is being undressed, and to avoid 'taste' as a superficial thing, if you understand. Putting your feelings on the screen is not forbidden by the document.

Actually it's trying to get closer to your feelings. And I'm a part of it too, as the cameraman is a part of it, that's why the tripod is not allowed.

RW: And the actors.

TV: Of course, the actors.

RW: My own position — and this is something I've been saying for years — is that when ideas and beliefs harden into dogma, that's to say an unbreakable set of rules, they immediately become oppressive, and that freedom is crucial. It's good to have a set of rules, but you should be able to break the rules, it's important to be able to break the rules.

TV: In this case we felt the exact opposite way. The conventions were there...

UT: There were rules there from the beginning.

TV: Yes, the rules at the beginning were, if you do a film, you put lights on, and when you do a film you put strings on, and makeup, and that's what the rules were, and we had to forbid them. And maybe that's oppressive but it felt very liberating, immediately.

RW: I'm sure, yes, and I absolutely agree. It's a wonderful thing to be happening, especially in view of the complete hopelessness at present of contemporary Hollywood, with all its special effects. There are no human beings in Hollywood films any more.

TV: Yes, I think if we should compare it to Hollywood, the most important thing, one of the important things, about *Dogma* is that it leaves room for the big films, it makes a contrast, and I guess as long as a film is a consequent [consistent? — ed.] film, as long as it is only special effects or personal films, it helps to create a much better artistic atmosphere. It's all the mediocrity that we're trying to avoid.

RW: I just thought about this when I was reading the press release, which says that in the script the dead sister was to haunt the party as a ghost, and you couldn't do this because of the rules. I think it would have been wonderful.

TV: Yes, I'm very sad that we didn't succeed.³

RW: But that's an example of dogma becoming oppressive.

TV: It is one example, and I think it's the best example, but there's a couple

more. And that was oppression. We really needed the strings there to create the metaphysics of the story, and *Dogma* is limiting, it's very difficult with *Dogma* to create higher layers of understanding. You see what you see.

RW: Yes. What I'm saying is really, that it's wonderful to make a set of rules in opposition to the standard rules that exist, but then later on you should be able to go ahead and break your own set of rules.

TV: Yes. I think that doing another *Dogma* film right now would be suicidal, because the fine thing about *Dogma* is to create renewal, and to do another *Dogma* film right after would be to create another convention, which would be very oppressive. I would see it as a monitor that I can return to.

RW: As long as you don't intend to go out and make *Titanic 2* or something...

TV: I'm tempted. Because it would be very much in contrary to the *Dogma* thing.

(Laughter).

RW: Yes, but you don't have to go that far.

TV: No, I don't think I'd be able to. *Titanic* with no lighting, no... I'd sink the ship for real.

RW: We'll pass on to the film, which, as you've gathered, I love. I found it both liberating and exhilarating.

TV: Thank you.

RW: I'm afraid this is rather a long preamble I've got here... I see it as the culmination of a longstanding tradition of films that interrogate the traditional family, which goes right back to the

3. Two editorial comments:

- (a) Vinterberg finds a way over this problem without transgressing the laws of *Dogma 95*: Helene's discovery of Linda's letter is intercut with shots of Pia sliding underwater in the bath, visually reproducing the suicide. (b) However, he does transgress near the end of the film: we are shown Christian's hallucinations of his dead sister when he is knocked almost unconscious. There seems no logical difference in principle between showing the hallucinations and showing Linda-as-ghost.

beginnings of cinema, and even seemingly conservative films from the past that were also to some degree honest — I think for example of *Meet Me in St. Louis* — couldn't help emphasizing the tensions and repressions inherent in family life. I think all this has come to a head in the last decade, especially in recent American Independent films, for example *The House of Yes*, and most intelligently in *The Daytrippers*, which is wonderful in relation to your film, by the way...

TV: I must see that.

RW: Now *The Celebration* seems to push everything to the point of total disintegration, hence it seems the ultimate step in this process, the end of the patriarchal family. And the big question one is left asking is, What will replace it? I don't know if you want to deal with this or not... A different model of family? No families at all? Communal living?

UT: I think families will still be there, I think they should be. I think it is important, if there are ghosts lying around, to grab them, deal with them.

RW: But doesn't every family have ghosts? And isn't that an argument against families?

TV: I think the family is an institution that you cannot avoid, biologically or culturally. It is there to be there. You can try to create the illusion that 'I've left my family', but it will always be there, and the ghosts will always be there. That's the cynicism of it. And I think, when you ask What is there after?, there's only the laugh, the small relief. You have to watch the cynicism of it, and say That's how it is, how it's always been, how it's going to be. And perhaps, watching such a film, you can recognize something, be aware of it, but no further than that. To argue against family is not necessary, because it's not possible. It will only be an argument, it will never come to real life.

RW: I'm not so sure...

TV: You know, I think people have tried, especially young sons and daughters raging against their fathers and mothers, have tried to break out of their families, but at the end of the day, it's still the family, and at the end of the day it is the great value also of this film that the family does everything they have in their

hands to keep this structure, even though they have to oppress a poor son who has been abused by the father. It's a strength — you also have to watch it that way. I know that's very cynical to say, but I think for me that's how it is, and that's why, if you watch this film, something awful happens all the time and the structure keeps on going: They say 'Let's have our coffee', and everything is back. And Christian tries to destroy it again, and it gets into shape again. In the end, the father dies...

RW: More precisely, he's eliminated...

TV: Eliminated, yes. And the family comes into shape.

RW: But it's a different family.

TV: It is a different family.

RW: It's become a group of people who see each other as equals and don't seem to want to dominate each other.

TV: That's right. And of course I think in many cases you have to clean out the skeletons, to have a family which does not oppress you.

UT: That is also in relation to... It doesn't have to be two sons, it could be with your own wife for instance, you have to have understanding, an honest understanding: this is how I am, this is how you are. It's a couple, or five family members, but it doesn't make one unit, but individuals fighting but staying together. You can't avoid that.

RW: Eventually what it comes back to is the idea of the couple and whether people should be living as couples, rather than as groups.

UT: To me they should live as couples, of course they should, because we are...what's the word?...monogamous, I think...

RW: Are we? I'm not.

(Laughter, slightly uneasy).

UT: You live amongst people, a choice of people, whether you want to live with a person or not you are bound to talk to somebody eventually, you are not a stranger away from the world, so you have to have an understanding, do you know what I'm saying?

RW: Certainly, but you can have an understanding with six people. Why just one?

TV: Even though I'm very young, I've tried both. I was raised in a commune, I lived in a commune for twelve years.

And now I live married, like bourgeoisie, very much. And I think, in both places, whether you're six persons or two persons, it's very important to set the other parts free and it's very important to be generous to each other, which is not a fact with this family, and very important not to violate the borders of the persons that you live with. And that's what it's about, this film.

RW: Absolutely.

TV: Helge, the father, violated the borders of his kids, that's not allowed. Then you can't live. So it is, but I think you've raised very interesting questions, and I think it's very difficult to answer them...

RW: I think so too.

TV: It is very difficult. And I think a lot of family structure comes out of anxiety, anxiety to be left alone, anxiety to live in a different way, and that's not a good foundation for families, and also marriages. Many marriages develop out of comfort and anxiety. And that's also I hope somewhere in this film. There's a lot of anxiety, the sister especially is very frightened, and the mother. Hopefully they're cleansed, just a little bit, and more relaxed.

RW: Yes — more relaxed and more liberated, less likely to want to dominate others. Which is the key, I think.

TV: And also the main character, Christian, is a very closed character in the beginning, and his whole sexuality is completely imploded into his mind, turned into aggression. And I guess that is resolved at the end — it's a bit Hollywoodish, that, almost marrying the waitress, but all the fear and all the aggression is replaced by some kind of love.

RW: It may be Hollywood but I think it's beautiful. But then I love Hollywood...

TV: I do too...

RW: Not contemporary Hollywood, but the Hollywood of the past.

TV: That's the specific point: Hollywood is also very true, and very generous.

RW: I'm glad you started talking about Christian, because the next thing I wanted to ask... It's not really a question, more a statement, which you might like to throw about. I've only seen the film

once, by the way. I want to see it again tomorrow, if I can get in...

TV: If we can help you, just tell us.

RW: I'd love you to help me. [They did!]. But about Christian. What I found so inspirational in the film is that Christian becomes one of the great heroic figures of modern cinema. I think Sylvester Stallone and Arnold Schwarzenegger pale into insignificance in comparison to what Christian does.

UT (laughing): Well, I hope you put that on paper. It's a funny comparison I must say. But yes, he *is* a hero.

RW: He's so strong.

UT: What he does is more courageous I think. Not that I have any experience of the situation Christian is in. But I think it must be a very big step to take, after thirty years, to finally speak up for himself, with all the pressure that's built up. It's a very dramatic speech. In a form like that, it's either do or die. With his father listening nothing can ever be the same. And they know he will fail. In the basement, the servants have a meeting, to force him on. Yes, that's a heroic thing.

RW: And inspiring — truly inspiring. Anyone who was in a similar, or even a parallel, situation who sees the film might feel empowered to go out and do the same thing.

UT: I would hope so.

TV: I had a phone call the other day which frightened me, from I think a quite dangerous person, about thirty years old, on my answering machine. He bragged that he knocked down his father the day before his father's birthday: 'I did the same thing that was in your film...' Which was not what we meant. But he did it before he saw the film. I don't think it's important because that's a sick man talking, and he's sick anyway.

RW: You're not responsible for the actions of people in that condition.

TV: That is what I thought, and that is why I didn't call him back.

RW: It's like Hitchcock's response when he was told that after seeing *Psycho* a young man went out and committed his third murder. He asked what films he had seen before he committed the first two.

TV: Yes, that's a very good comment.

RW: I want to ask about the black

character. I've been unable to find the name of either the actor or the character in either the press release or the festival catalogue. The character has the same name as the actor...

TV: He's my best friend. I'll write it down for you...

[Gbatokai Dakinah].

RW: Then I can make sure he gets acknowledged in *CineAction* anyway. It seems to me a key role in the film — he's the one outsider, and an absolutely necessary character *because* he can stand outside all of the tumult that's going on, outside the communal insanity of the family. And he keeps calm under pressure, even when he's being openly insulted. Do you want to talk about his role in the film?

TV: I have one maybe very disappointing, but very good, reason for him to be in the film, and that is that he lives in New York and he's my very best friend. And I had only one way of bringing him back to Denmark, which was giving him a part in this film. And that is the reason and I must be frank.

RW: I think that's wonderful.

TV: I think what then happened when he came into this film was of course what you said, something from outside, something from another planet, comes into this family, and it *is* a sort of parallel to Christian. Something new is always something frightening to such an enclosed family structure, and it's very visible to put him inside this and see him being rejected by them, humiliated by this family. And also I think it makes us *watch the family from outside*. And it creates for me a very specific and very simple understanding of the fascism of our country, the fascism of Europe these days.

RW: *And Canada. And America.*

TV: And America and all over. I don't have a finger here to point, and I don't want to. I'm not trying to simplify. But it is to me a very good picture of the fascism which is in the family and which is now spreading out all over society. Also I think it has created an understanding between Christian's brother Michael and Gbatokai. That was one of the most visible conflicts of the film, they were actually almost fighting, but at the end cleaning out the father brings them together.

They sit next to each other at the table, and to me that's another marriage, parallel to Christian and the waitress.

RW: Given the character's importance in the film, and your personal feelings for the actor, it's a very nice *auteur* touch that you drive him to the party. [Vinterberg has a very brief cameo as the taxi driver].

TV (acknowledging with laughter another 'transgression' against the *Dogma* credo): Oh yeah, yeah, all right... And I know I wasn't much good as a taxi driver. But he was my friend and I brought him home. And mainly I was in the cab because I was not allowed to be credited, and that was my way of teasing...

RW: I'm about out of questions. I was going to ask if you've seen the other film that I loved in the festival, which was the Tsai Ming-Liang, *The Hole*.

TV: We arrived yesterday night. We're still jet-lagged.

RW: I found it so interesting that the two films in this festival that I really loved are absolutely diametrical opposites: the most stylized film, as against the most direct, in-your-face film.

TV: It's strange because this whole film is mainly driven by aggressions. It's such a violent atmosphere. And I think there's not many people talking about that: the oppression within a family. I guess there's a lot of oppression all over, oppression of ourselves, and then at night we dream that we beat up people instead. And when I watch the set, shooting this film, and I see how easy it *is to put a light to the gasoline, everybody*, everything flames up and everybody's singing this racist song, and the black guy and Michael are almost fighting and just screaming, and... I start to worry, because there *is* a lot of aggression within normal people today, and I start to worry Where does that come from? How does it come out? It's not only about family oppression. There *is* a lot of self-oppression as well.

RW: Perhaps the self-oppression is a product of oppression within the family?

TV: I guess you're right. It *was* the scenes that went on like... [Sound of catching fire, or taking off].

RW: Because families have traditionally been about ownership: 'my wife', just

Lee Kang-Sheng, Tsai Ming-Liang's resident icon, in *The Hole*.

like 'my land, my car, my children'.

TV: I think you're right. I think that's why people faint in Denmark. Because they sit in their seats, and the aggression rises. And fortunately they have a laugh. But I've seen it in the cinemas, people are ready to kill this father. Scary. And yet satisfying.

[Pause]

RW: Is there anything else you would like to say?

TV: Yes. This was a wonderful interview. For the first time we elaborated a conversation, it's very nice. I must thank you for that.

RW: Well, I certainly thank you for being so frank, and open, and giving so much. And not getting angry with me when I say terrible things about *Dogma*.

TV: It's very rare to have a chance...

[Pause].

RW: I'm really looking forward to whatever you two do next. Plans?

UT: Not together.

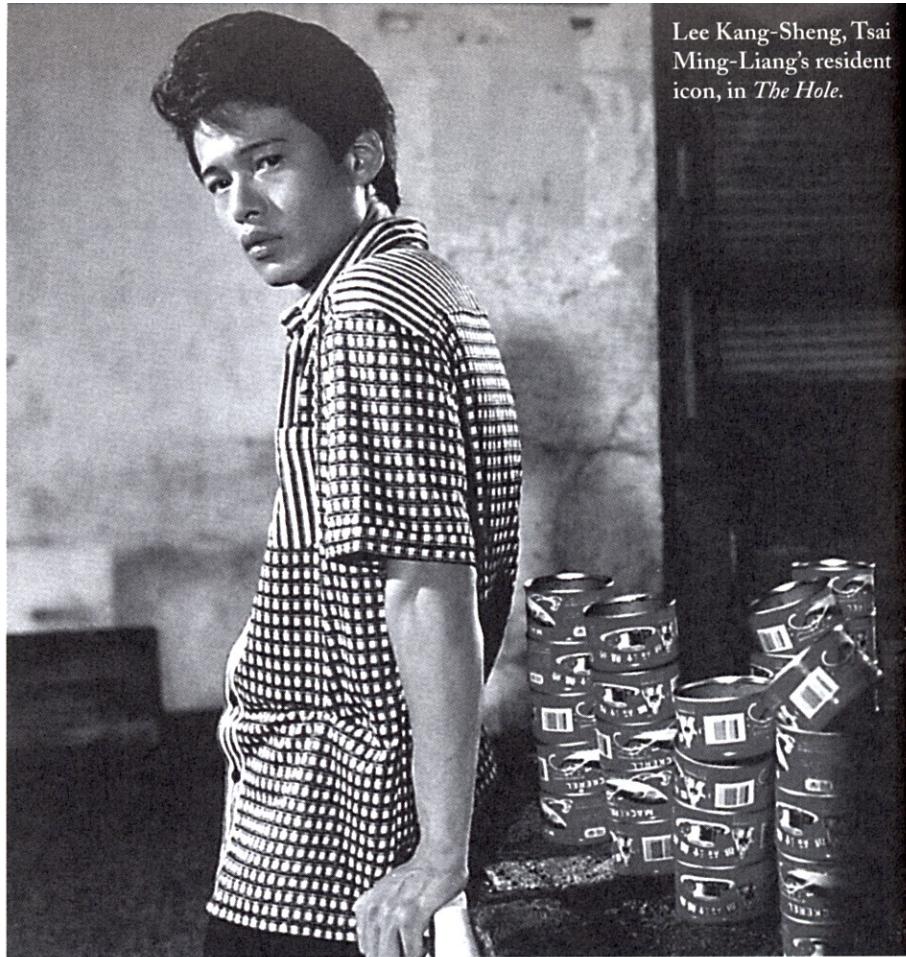
RW: I hope you'll do something together again, because you're a marvellous team. In fact, everybody in *The Celebration* seems to work so well, it's such an ensemble film...

UT: Everybody knows each other there.

TV: There are two different kinds of film to make. Sometimes you do a film where you have the feeling that you have to create everything from the beginning, every day of shooting, and you come home and you think, and the film *eats* you. And there's the other kind of film where you come early in the morning, and when you go home in the evening you feel even better. And it's because there's something in the story that is more important than us. We're just the humble guests of this very family and scenery. And that's very satisfying of course, and that's why I think we had a lot of laughs and a very good time doing this very evil story. It was a fantastic, amazing summer, and there was a lot of very good mood.

RW: It may be an evil story, but it's also a marvellously liberating one, in the way it's handled. It didn't have to be...

[Enter press agent: we had gone way over our allotted time...]



TORONTO FILM FESTIVAL 1998

The Hole

by **Robin Wood**

'In the year 2000 we are grateful that we still have Grace Chang's songs to comfort us'.

— Tsai Ming-Liang, postscript to *The Hole*.

**'And all over the world
Strangers talk only about
The weather.'**

— Tom Waits.

'It's the end of the world'

— the drunk in the Bodega Bay cafe in *The Birds*.

The Hole represents a radical and universal extension of the thematic of Tsai Ming-Liang's earlier films *Rebels of the Neon God* and *Vive L'Amour* (I have not been able to see *The River*). The earlier films were based on the premise that urban alienation under 'advanced' capitalism, with its advanced but hopelessly misapplied technology and its advanced architecture that places human beings in their separate boxes, has reached its ultimate point, where true human contact and communication has become impossible. The three members of the sexual triangle of *Vive L'Amour* never really meet or touch or confide in each other, or even manage to articulate their despair, because they no longer know how to. One may read 'the end of things' into (or out of) this, but the films' preoccupation remains at the level of the individual. *The Hole* — essentially a two-character piece, as *Vive L'Amour* was a three-character piece — resumes this preoccupation but places it in a more explicit social context, the chronically leaking apartment of *Rebels of the Neon God* here extended into a cosmic vision of apocalypse: there is



permanent rain, civilization is visibly falling to pieces in the decaying buildings which a little bit of plaster can't fix, everyone is falling victim to a deathly virus which turns them into perpetually sneezing human cockroaches desperately trying to burrow down into the dark. It is perhaps the most intelligent and cogent of the millenium films we have had so far, rigorously refusing any consolation or final reassurance.

I have been amazed, this past summer, at the wilful ignorance of my fellow humans. We have had, here in Toronto, record-breaking high temperatures, extreme humidity, repeated pollution warnings (for those suffering from 'respiratory disorders'); almost everyone I encounter casually, in stores, elevators, bars, responds to these phenomena with 'Aren't we lucky? Such a wonderful warm summer'. No one seems to make the connection with the accounts in their daily papers of tornadoes, hurricanes, landslides, earthquakes, droughts in other parts of the world. A decade ago scientists were already issuing warnings that if the current levels of pollution and environ-

mental destruction continued the planet would become uninhabitable within... fifty?... a hundred?... two hundred? years (estimates varied). But now that the evidence that these predictions are coming true is available all around us, to our eyes and senses, the predictions have mysteriously disappeared (they are certainly no longer being reported in the capitalist media). The destruction of our planet must be linked directly to the greed, excess and mindless materialism that characterize the capitalist mentality: it is the millionaires, the tycoons, the factory owners, the businessmen, that are recklessly destroying all possibility of human future, through the tools that their money has bought: the media, the existing political machinery (no left wing has any *effective* life, no public *voice*, now in North America). What is especially terrifying is the apparent ability of the capitalist machine to keep whole populations in a state of total mystification: the media and the educational system combine to prevent people from *thinking* any more, in any real sense of the word. We all have, after all, so much: the latest fashions, even better

beers and shampoos and automobiles, all these wonderful condominiums to shut ourselves up in away from wider contact, the latest 'blockbuster' movies with their dazzling special effects and explosions, those Hollywood millenium films that allow us to enjoy the destruction of the civilization we all secretly (and usually unconsciously) hate and resent but then restore it at the end so that we needn't be troubled by any need to think about replacing it with something very different (which would require the kind of thought that the brainwashing of consumer capitalism has rendered impossible). We have been told, since the well-merited collapse of Soviet Communism and the onset of globalization, that capitalism is now inevitable, the true destiny of the human race. If that is the case (it may be), then the end of life on the planet is equally inevitable and probably imminent. (I should confess here, perhaps, that, given the readiness of my fellow humans to remain mystified — we still have minds hidden away somewhere, don't we? — my sympathies are increasingly with the so-called 'lesser animals', totally innocent of all charges, even that of culpable ignorance, but in imminent danger of extermination at the hands of their 'superiors beings').

If the reader objects that I have wandered too far from the film, I would retort that, on the contrary, I have outlined a very precise account of its meaning, even down to the previous parenthesis: a cat who disappears from the narrative, perhaps killed by the fumes of the squad despatched to control the virus by chemical spraying, has a significant role.

But perhaps a more precise account of the detail of the film may be in order. It is seven days to the year 2000. In a decaying building, amid the steadily pouring rain, a young man and a young woman occupy vertically adjacent apartments: as they are not named I shall call them respectively X and Y; both will be familiar from Tsai's previous films. The building has been declared a site of the virus and its inhabitants ordered to evacuate, but a few have refused to leave. The water supply is to be cut off on the first day of

the year 2000, and residents are told they can't drink the rainwater (presumably contaminated); there will be no further garbage clearance. X continues to open his grocery store in the otherwise abandoned horizontally adjacent shopping mall; his only prospective customer is an elderly man who wants a sauce that ceased to be manufactured many years ago; X's only surviving function as store-keeper is to feed the stray cat he has adopted. In the film's first scene X is asleep on the sofa in his underwear. He is awakened by a plumber, answering a complaint from Y about a leak. The plumber's only apparent achievement, while uncovering a water pipe, is to knock a small round hole in the middle of X's living-room floor — the hole that gives the film its title and provides a potential means of contact between the two protagonists, the tentative development of which (from hostility to at least the *desire* for contact, any contact) structures the narrative. The film's narrative segments are shot in the manner Tsai has made very much his own: long, often static takes, in which we are sometimes invited to watch while nothing happens; long-shot and its corollary, the rigorous refusal of close-ups; a conspicuous stylization that insists that the viewer be aware of him/herself as spectator, aware of the camera, aware of shot-length, aware of time (starting from the very first shot of X asleep, held far beyond any narrative necessity, with no action whatever). The narrative, however, is interspersed with five musical numbers shot à la Hollywood (we could almost be in Betty Grable territory). Is this the first — and perhaps the last — musical about the end of the world?

What I want to address here is what seems to me a total misconception commonly applied to the film, presumably by those still desperate to find glimmers somewhere in our encroaching darkness: the notion that *The Hole* marks something of a new development in Tsai's work because its conclusion is more optimistic, it holds out a hope not apparent in the earlier work. On the contrary: there is more hope in the bleak ending of *Vive L'Amour*, when the woman, after her long silent walk through the maze-like paths of a desolate vacant park, at last breaks down and cries, her tears at least suggest-

ing the possibility that passive despair will be replaced by an active desire for change. The alleged new optimism of *The Hole* depends partly on a hasty assumption about the status of the musical numbers, but more on a thorough misreading of the ending. What we see is as follows: first, X passes down to Y, through the hole, a glass of water; second, he reaches down his arm and pulls her up into his apartment; third, they are then shown in the kind of gaudy attire associated with weddings in musical comedies, accompanied by the last of the five songs on the soundtrack ('...days of carefree love...'). There are a number of (it seems to me) quite unarguable reasons *not* to interpret this as any kind of 'happy end':

1. In the social (and cosmic) context, the film has made it abundantly clear that there is no hope whatever: there will be no drinking water, no garbage disposal (garbage bags are simply dropped from apartment windows to land in the street), no repairs to the eternally leaking apartments, no end to the ecological disaster represented by the perpetual rain, and presumably, after a time, no food. Even if one takes the ending literally (which I claim is impossible), what kind of optimism is it that places one moment of contact within the inevitable end of civilization?

2. Y already has the virus: we have seen her sneezing, crawling on all fours, trying to hide in dark corners. A glass of water will not cure it.

3. The passing down of the glass of water is possible — just; the hauling up of Y into X's apartment is not. The film is absolutely clear about this. In one previous scene X puts his leg through the hole and his thigh gets painfully stuck; in a subsequent scene he tries to widen the hole by smashing frantically at the surrounding floor with a hammer, completely without success, his actions becoming increasingly desultory, shifting from a genuine attempt to break through to a half-hearted, despairing frustration at the impossibility, culminating in his collapse in tears of frustration and impotence. In other words, at some not-precisely-definable point, the narrative moves to the level of fantasy. X does not save Y. No one is saved. No one can be.

So to the vexed question of the musi-

cal numbers. Yes, they involve the actors playing X and Y. But is this sufficient to suggest that they represent (as some have maintained) the characters' fantasies? I think not: nothing, anywhere in the film, suggests that X and Y *have* such fantasies, or anything resembling them. I attribute the error to the lingering power of the 'realist' aesthetic: everything in a film must somehow be explained in terms of the diegetic world, however difficult this may prove; apparently extraneous interruptions must therefore be the characters' fantasies. No. They represent the escapist fantasies that capitalism has expediently provided, by which we have been at once captivated and distracted. The musical numbers are central to the film's despair, which appears to me complete. Tsai walks a very difficult tightrope here: the effect is both ironic and not, and this apparent paradox is crystallized in his written postscript: 'In the year 2000 we are grateful that we still have Grace Chang's songs to comfort us' — a postscript surely characterized, simultaneously, by gratitude and savage bitterness. What Grace Chang's songs epitomize in this context is the entire phenomenon of 'popular entertainment', which (at its best) has certainly comforted us, but has also lulled us into a false sense of security.

The most telling — and disturbing, and hideously funny — instance is the fourth song, an entirely frivolous number in which a woman has figured out that the surest way to get rid of unwanted male suitors is to sneeze repeatedly. It occurs immediately after Y's sneeze, which confirms that she has contracted the deathly virus. After that, the 'happy end', with the glossy wedding attire, can only be read as an ironic commentary on our readiness to be *too* comforted by the songs of Grace Chang.

If the ultimate effect of the film is, nonetheless, the reverse of depressing, this has nothing to do with any tangible 'hope' it extends to its audience (which, given the context, could only be false hope). It has to do rather with Tsai's delight in his art, which expresses itself not in flamboyance and exuberance but in economy and precision. Or with his evident affection for his characters, who are never treated with condescension or superiority, and for the actors who incarn-

nate them. Perhaps, also, a certain paradoxical exhilaration can be achieved through the *acceptance* of despair and, beyond that acceptance, the sense that 'freedom's just another word/ For nothing left to lose...' From that viewpoint, Y's stripping of her rotting wallpaper while she conducts an imaginary telephone conversation with X (who is, as revealed by the intercutting, out of his apartment) is a more positive action than her earlier attempt to stick it back in place.

The Hole is a remarkable achievement. It confirms Tsai's place as one of the most authentically original filmmakers working today anywhere in the world, the originality deriving from genuinely felt and understood inner pressures. It is shocking that his films are not generally available.¹

Since this was written, *Vive L'Amour* has appeared on a superb DVD.

TORONTO FILM FESTIVAL 1998

The Apple

by Robin Wood

If *The Celebration* relates to the New Wave in its rejection of dominant conventions and its corresponding espousal of a new realism, the 'spontaneous' capturing with a constantly mobile handheld camera of actuality (albeit an actuality that is staged and acted), *The Hole* relates to the New Wave's opposite

extreme: the fascination with stylization, with artifice, with the foregrounding of the medium, manifested in very different ways in films by Godard and Demy, and in the Chabrol of *Les Bonnes Femmes*. *The Apple's* relationship is different again: one might argue that it bypasses the New Wave to return to one of its major sources, the Italian neorealist movement, and especially to the work of Rossellini (who was, with Bazin and Renoir, one of the New Wave's triumvirate of father figures).

The Apple was directed by Samira Makhmalbaf, the seventeen-year-old daughter of Mohsen Makhmalbaf who wrote the screenplay and edited the film. But any temptation to see it as essentially her father's film was called into question by his newest work *The Silence*, also shown in the festival. Makhmalbaf's

The Naderi sisters in *The Apple*



career strikes me as increasingly odd. His early films (*The Peddler*, *The Cyclist*), although already showing an attraction to symbolism and allegory, are essentially works of raw and brutal social realism; *Moment of Innocence*, which stands as a kind of marker in his career so far, separating the early films from the two most recent, evokes Kiarostami in its self-reflexivity, though not at all in its tone, a charming and funny *jeu d'esprit* quite unlike both what precedes and what follows. The abrupt change comes with *Gabbeh*, by far his most famous film in the West, celebrated both for its extraordinary visual beauty and its (to western eyes) exotic and obscure mythological narrative. I saw it, in fact, as his calling-card to the West, a film not exactly insincere (it is very impressive in its way) but calculated primarily as the kind of work that wins prizes at European festi-

vals. *The Silence* proves me wrong: it appears that, for the time being, we must accept the predominance in Makhmalbaf's work of the aesthetic over the political, an escape (in terms at least of my own interests) into the obsession with beautiful images. *The Apple* relates, superficially, to *Moment of Innocence* (in its use of 'real' people playing themselves), but to nothing else in Makhmalbaf's work. Despite her father's active participation in the production, Samira's film seems influenced more by Kiarostami.

It is splendidly appropriate that Kiarostami was awarded the Rossellini prize: his work strikes me as not only a continuation but a creative extension of that of the greatest director of the neorealist movement. The fundamental principles of neorealist strategy and style are carried over into *The Apple*, very

strictly: location shooting, the use of non-professionals (which Ingrid Bergman essentially became when she worked with Rossellini: one rarely gets the impression in *Viaggio in Italia* that she is *acting*, and she herself commented that she 'just walked through' the film), the simplest possible technical resources and shooting method, the camera a recording instrument that never attracts attention to itself through 'striking' angles or conspicuous movement yet is never disowned as a presence. Thematically, the connection to Kiarostami is also clear: *The Apple* takes up his characteristic preoccupation with children and their social situation. Yeats's phrase 'the ignominy of boyhood' springs to mind, Samira Makhmalbaf extending it to the ignominy of girlhood — though Kiarostami, who wrote the screenplay

The blind and continuously veiled mother teased by the dangling apple.



for *The White Balloon*, also anticipated her there. *Where Is the Friend's Home?* is surely one of the finest films about the ignominy of childhood ever made, certainly worthy to stand beside *Germania, Anno Zero*. *The Apple*, the cinematic rendering of the 'true life' story of two little girls kept locked up by their father for the first twelve years of their lives, with the girls playing themselves, could almost be considered a sequel, though a very different one from Kiarostami's own (...*And Life Goes On*, aka *Life and Nothing More*). Some western critics have jumped to the conclusion that a preoccupation with childhood must be characteristic of Iranian cinema generally. I know far too little of it to judge, but it seems plausible that it is a concern of Iran's most progressive filmmakers, and I shall dare speculate (very tentatively) on a possible reason for this. We are frequently bombarded in the West with horror stories about the position and treatment of women in Iran, and the grotesque and horrific punishments meted out to any who transgress or rebel. It seems arguable that, in such a context, it would be impossible to produce films that protested against this or could be construed as promoting dangerous notions of women's emancipation: Kiarostami, after all, got into enough trouble for making a film that failed unambiguously to denounce suicide. One can therefore read the preoccupation with the horrors of childhood as a *displacement*, the substitution of a concern to which it would be difficult for the authorities to object for one that is still too explosive to project publicly. Samira Makhmalbaf in her first film (which one hopes will be the first of many) manages, by centring her work on *female* children, to imply the taboo subject under cover of the acceptable one.

I found *The Apple* a quite magical experience. It deals, not with the children's incarceration (except retrospectively), but with their release (the film opens with the newspaper account of the neighbours' belated report to the authorities), and their intelligence, wonder and bewilderment (the bewilderment of appearing in a film perhaps enabling them to reproduce the bewilderment of

their initial liberation) are transmitted to the spectator via the director's obvious empathic mediation. This sense of intimacy with the girls' experience is balanced throughout by the distancing of the Rossellinian objective camera: we share, but we also watch. The progress of the film is the process of the children's liberation, initiated and intermittently guided by an intelligent social worker who has the courage to allow them simply to go out and learn from their environment and their peers, with a minimum of adult interference. The dangers of this are not stressed but they are clearly presented: the girls, totally ignorant of the outside world, cross streets, walk along railway lines, relate to anyone they chance to encounter. The film is committed to the inherent generosity and readiness to cooperate of relatively unrepresed children, but the view of children is never sentimentalized: the boy selling ice creams initially demands money (of which the girls have no understanding), and takes back their ices when they can't pay; the young girls they meet bicker occasionally, their generous impulses qualified by the egoism necessary as a defence against 'the ignominy of childhood'. But perhaps the film's final strength and intelligence can be seen in the treatment of the parents. The process of liberation is not confined to the children; it applies also to the father, and ultimately the mother.

The parents are never demonized. If the father has been, in effect, almost unimaginably cruel, it was with the best intentions, the intentions of his culture carried to an almost parodic extreme. He is characterized by ignorance, simplicity and superstition, but the ignorance and superstition are firmly related to what he himself has been taught. Girls have been allowed to go to school in Iran only since 1979. His doctrine is summed up in the sentence he has internalized and literalized from a book on the education of females ('A girl is a flower and would fade in the sun'); his daughters mustn't play in the street because they would be 'dishonoured' if a boy touched them; equally, they must be kept locked up indoors because boys might climb the wall into the yard to retrieve a ball. All is done in the name of parental care and

concern. There is certainly no intention of cruelty, and it is clear that, their incarceration aside, the girls have not been physically abused: he *loves* them, in his clumsy, unintentionally abusive way. His major grievance is that he has been slandered: the newspaper reports have claimed that the girls were chained, and this was untrue (we believe him). Hence, although deprived of any companionship but each other's, and denied any possibility to learn and develop, in their ignorance of any other life and actually unaware of their deprivation, the children have retained their natural cheerfulness, goodness and resilience, and display no obvious neurotic symptoms. This is what enables them to confront the outside world with curiosity, delight and wonder, and without fear.

The liberation of the children would seem to be a relatively simple matter: though in need, obviously, of a great deal of help and support, they are swiftly aware of all that they have missed. The liberation of the parents is presented as far more tentative, and far more painful: how does an elderly man confront the fact that he has been hideously wrong all his life, that everything he has been taught is a grotesque lie? I find his reluctant acceptance of his daughters' liberation, and his subsequent cautious acceptance of an external world he has always been taught to fear, very moving. And what of the blind mother, who apparently has also never left the house, and who has internalized thoroughly the joint oppression of the female and the disabled, her natural resistance emerging only in the repeated obscenities with which she regales her husband ('son of a bitch', 'bastard', according to the subtitles)? Will she ever taste the apple of the title, that dangles before her veiled and unseeing eyes (we never see her face) when she at last, left alone in the house, the gate at last unlocked, wanders out into the street? It touches her, but she doesn't even know what it is. As Florence Jacobowitz commented after a screening, at the film's end the house is empty, *all* its prisoners released from their captivity.

What, finally, is the status of this remarkable film? It seems to present itself as a quasi-documentary, but 'quasi'

can cover a lot of territory (so, of course, can 'documentary', and always has). Yet what one is finally left with is its expressive use of symbolism: the apple, the watch, the mother's blindness. (The apple, of course — this being way outside Judaeo-Christian culture — has nothing to do with Eve or sin, it is simply a symbol of life, the natural goodness of existence with which our contemporary civilization has so disastrously lost contact. It is time we realized that, within western corporate capitalism, we are as far removed from 'the apple' as the veiled blind woman whose face it repeatedly touches. We exist within a social/political system from which all of us should be demanding liberation). Were these elements miraculously present in the 'true story', or are they the inventions of either the screenwriter or his daughter?

Ominously, the listing of *The Apple* in the film festival catalogue makes no mention of a North American distributor. Of the fifteen films I saw at press screenings, this was the only one that not a single member of the audience walked out of, yet almost no one wrote about it in their columns. Of course, I sympathize deeply with our journalist critics: unlike myself, they have their careers to think of, and can only write about films they know will 'sell'. I find it interesting that the critics of the Toronto Star, when they listed (at great length) the films they admired in the festival, found it quite unnecessary to mention any of the three films I have written about in this issue, nor did anyone utter a word on behalf of *Flowers of Shanghai*. Either they or I have no understanding of what is 'important', and as *Flowers of Shanghai*, *The Hole* and *The Apple* may never be released in North America, readers may never have the chance to decide who is right.

Robin Wood is the author of Sexual Politics and Narrative Film: Classical Hollywood and Beyond, published by Columbia University Press, November 1998

TORONTO FILM FESTIVAL 1998

Ron Havilio's *Fragments * Jerusalem*

by **Florence Jacobowitz**

Ron Havilio's *Fragments * Jerusalem* (*Shivrei T'munot *Yerushalayim*) is a personal meditation on the history of a family and their city of residence, Jerusalem. The film takes the form of a diary and travelogue; it is marked by a subjective voice, evident in its idiosyncratic digressions, biases, flaneurism — a wandering through history and time. *Fragments * Jerusalem* avoids a linear approach to history; instead, it follows the logic and rhythms of memory, tracing the personal inflections and modulations of the author's voice.

Like a family or tourist album, the film's function is commemorative and elegiac. This is, in many ways, inherent to the media of still photography and the cinema. Images register an absence and remind one of what once was and is no longer. Photographs and motion pictures defy death and loss by preserving a moment, freezing it and inducing memory. Havilio describes his film as "an attempt to remember people and places which time, wars and the pace of modern life have erased". The film is a means of combating erasure, forgetting. It serves as a personal protest against inevitable loss. Places are destroyed, abandoned or rebuilt and family ancestors or an individual's contribution to cultural/national history quickly fade from memory. Havilio exploits the cinema's potential to memorialize and represent a moment in time. It is as if by doing so one can freeze time, and keep the memory of a person or a place safe from the ravages of destruction or simply change and transition.

A number of contemporary artists working through various media are creating works like Havilio's, ones that fix memory and give it shape and permanence. For example, British sculptor Rachel Whiteread's plaster castings of the space inside a wardrobe, a room or a house, in many ways serve the same purpose; they represent the artist's attempt to memorialize, to solidify an abandoned, forgotten object or place. Havilio's zealous mission to preserve and remember is evident in the monumental nature of his project — over ten years in the making, six hours in length, divided into two cycles of three and four chapters, respectively. Jerusalem's turbulent history speaks through its ruins and the layers of various historical periods that appear throughout the city, but one requires a guide — an archeologist — to open one's eyes and read the clues of what is there. This is Havilio's strategy; he foregrounds evidence of the past in present day life and suggests its continuity. This is true for both the city and the family roots he explores. The way to vitalize history is to outline the bridges and illustrate its significance to contemporary life. How does the past shape the present? Havilio's structuring use of cycles and repetition foregrounds the recurrent aspect of time and history. The Intifada of the 90s is historically related to the riots and conflicts of the 20s and 30s (similarly, earlier periods of Arab/Jewish co-existence give hope to a revival of tolerance). An ancestor, David Havilio, was sent as an emissary to Turkey 300 years before the filmmaker's father was sent to Istanbul in his work for the Israeli foreign service. Havilio's creative use of music, which includes Portuguese fados, a variety of Middle Eastern music both contemporary and of different periods, provides an aural bridge to complement the visuals. The strategy of linking the past to the pre-



Golde Paritzki in 1914 with two of her brothers; the family lived in the Muslim quarter and dressed in Arab garb for the portrait.

sent, even if it is only to use the snowfall in 1992 to evoke the great snowfall in 1920, vivifies and reifies the past through a process that gives it a visual form and tangibility.

The film's Hebrew title, *Shivrei T'munot * Yerushalayim* points to the idea of representation. It translates as fragments of images, Jerusalem, because the city is visited and remembered

through its images. Havilio's archival resource materials are fascinating; Jerusalem was always primarily a tourist site or destination for pilgrimage and so photography was one of the city's lucrative businesses. The photographs of Jaffa Road at various points in this century show a main thoroughfare sprinkled with photography studios like Krikorian's. Havilio utilizes these early

studio's photographs as resources, to visualize Jerusalem at the early part of the century as well those of photographers active in the 50's like Werner Braun, who chronicled the nascent emergence of the new state through its social and cultural life. Havilio's other fragments are drawn from a diverse range of sources including early moving images like the Lumière Bros.' *actualités* from the turn of the century, government sponsored newsreels, 8mm. home movies, postcards, a tourist's photo diary bought at a used bookstore as well as his own substantial collection of family images. Havilio's penchant for using his camera as a recording device was shared by his parents who have extraordinary home movies of their experiences in Yaounde in the 60s, when their car got stuck in the mud, of the filmmaker's younger brother dressed for Purim as a French gendarme on the balcony of their apartment in Paris, of the family's visits to ancient ruins in Turkey. This family trait is traced to an ancestor of his mother, Solomon Rosenthal, who earned his living as a metal engraver and also chronicled his journeys and experiences in the epistles he sent that survive him. Havilio continues his recording of familial life at his home in Ein Karem, and includes shots of his wife Jacqueline (often seen assisting with sound on location) and his three daughters. He incorporates into the film footage of the girls being driven to school on the first day of the school year, an improvised dance on the roof of their home, a visit to a carnival, a breakfast discussion where one of the girls requests a ride (making reference to a bus bombing), a visit to the grandparents. Even when the film digresses to these moments of daily familial life that can seem mundane and inconsequential, there is a sense of poignancy communicated in the subtle changes evident in the girl's growth or in their awareness of their father's at times obsessive need to record them, as if to hold on to something precious and fragile because these moments are so transitory and evanescent.

The heart of Havilio's exploration of Jerusalem revolves around Jaffa Gate, the main entrance to Jerusalem's Old City (which includes the neighboring

Jewish, Muslim, Armenian and Christian quarters, the Arab market, and the holy sites — the Wailing Wall, the Via Dolorosa, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the temple mount where Al Aksa mosque now stands) and the area adjacent to it where Jerusalem's commercial district, Mamila, once stood. The filmmaker repeatedly returns to Jaffa Gate and the site of Mamila, as if drawn to them magnetically. Between the War of Independence ('47) and the Six Day War ('67) this area around Jaffa Gate was a temporary no man's land, the boundary of a partitioned Jerusalem that split TransJordan and Israel. Havilio's film begins with his youthful memories of a divided city, of the 'Other' hidden in Arab East Jerusalem. The filmmaker's sense of outsideness intensified during his family's sojourn in Yaounde at the time of the Six Day War because when he returned, it was to a city greatly changed — Jaffa Gate was reopened and Jerusalem was without borders. The film registers the exhilaration Havilio experiences as a young man, exploring the alleyways of the Old City and its labyrinthine market, which is where he meets his future wife and partner. Anyone who lived or traveled to Jerusalem at this time can identify with the filmmaker's sense of freedom and adventure — there was a palpable sense of euphoria in Jerusalem after the war (which abruptly ends with the Intifada) and Jaffa Gate is a truly magical spot; one passes through and enters a world in many ways unchanged by time. The Lumière Bros.' choice to film Jaffa Gate, the Old City's front door, (and the Jerusalem train station) over traditional tourist sites illustrates its specialness as a place of entry and movement. Mr. Havilio extends his exploration of Jerusalem's neighborhoods through the narratives of other family members: his paternal grandparents' home in the Jewish quarter, his mother's family's home (and dairy) in the Muslim quarter, his father's family's relocation to an apartment outside of the Old City near the Machane Yehuda market, his ancestors' burial place on the Mount of Olives.

*Fragments * Jerusalem* elegizes the loss of neighborhoods like Mamila, which

was torn down following the reunification of Jerusalem. The image of the wrecking ball against a broken building evokes the pain of a physical wound. The demolition of Mamila is mourned in the film and Havilio tries to preserve its last remnants and to commemorate it by returning to film the stages of its destruction. Jerusalem is a city where lamentation is integral to its being, evident at places like the Wailing Wall or in the fact that Jews still lament the destruction of its ancient temples thousands of years later. The city witnessed centuries when its reputation, as Flaubert wrote, was of a place above which "God's curse floated". Jerusalem holds its ruins sacred and one of the city's ongoing dilemmas is the clash between preservation and memorialization, and the progress and rebuilding that is necessary to accommodate a modern metropolis. One fascinating section chronicles the building and later demolition of the Ottoman clock tower, unceremoniously plopped down on Jaffa Gate during Turkish rule and later removed by the British. The film tells this story by comparing various images of Jaffa Gate at the turn of the century, which visualizes the tower's incongruous appearance and erasure. Havilio's wanderings through time and history follow a logic that is intensely personal and subjective, as are the 'madeleines' that instigate memory and recollection. This lends a surreal quality to the film at times. For example, Havilio recalls the frequent illnesses in his youth and how he passed the time copying the flags of the world from a Larousse dictionary. As illustration, he includes a shot of these miniature flags and the inclusion, however digressive and apparently trivial, evokes the memory of childhood pursuits and passing time. The film's final shot of the ferris wheel and fairground in the former site of Mamila, lit up against the Old City is equally evocative, poetic and lyrical. The filmmaker includes his retelling of a dream he had of his grandmother singing in a foreign language; he mourns her loss and the misfortune of having failed to record her voice properly at her granddaughter's wedding. Havilio likewise commemorates his grandmother's

cousin Ezra, a forgotten author, in a lovely shot of Ezra waving goodbye to him from the balcony of his apartment, a moment captured before the stroke he later suffered. This shot summarizes the pathos the film engenders; it protests the way time and human nature conspire to forget, however unintentionally, people and events that must be held close and kept safe.

There is something precious and wonderful in the artist's ability to trace the narrative of his forebears particularly in light of Jewish history in this century, marked as it is by the almost total annihilation of European Jewry in the Holocaust. Havilio's family members have remarkably significant stories to tell, and the filmmaker vivifies the historical context and time in which they lived through photographs, letters and diaries which fill in the social/cultural details of the era. Isaac Rosenthal was instrumental in encouraging Montefiore to build the first Jewish settlement outside of the Old City walls, Mishkenot Sha'ananim. David Havilio tried to mediate between the radical messianic leader Shabtai Tzvi and the Jewish community of his time. Havilio's parents' wedding day coincided with the start of the War of Independence.

Havilio's father symbolizes an important rupture with the past (and a chapter is devoted to him alone) as he is the family's first secular, modern Jew, whose ties to Jerusalem are no longer based on religious devotion or the persecution of an exile. Havilio explores his outsideness to traditional Judaism — his loss of its significance — in a sequence where he surreptitiously films 'selichot' services (prayers of forgiveness, offered at various synagogues during the Days of the Awe prior to Rosh Hashana), as a means of reliving and thus recuperating some of his father's childhood experience which is irrevocably lost to him and his family.

*Fragments * Jerusalem* follows a Jewish approach to history in the way it challenges the boundaries between past and present, highlighting instead the links and continuities that keep events meaningful and alive. Havilio's film is a commemorative act that places identity within a context that gives it meaning.

An Interview with Satoshi Isaka on *Detective Riko*

by Richard Lippe

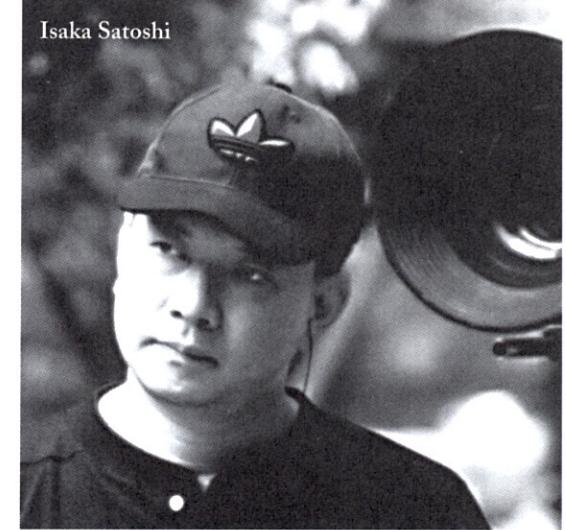
"New Beat of Japan," this year's Toronto International Film Festival national cinema programme, showcased seventeen feature films produced in the 1990s. Of the eight I saw, I was very impressed by Tetsuya Nakashima's *Happy Go Lucky* (1995) and *Beautiful Sunday* (1998), but it was Satoshi Isaka's *Detective Riko* (1997) that struck me as an unique and exciting discovery. I admire the film's discipline, intelligence and visual grace; it is one of the few films I have seen recently that truly deserves to be called elegant. What is unexpected considering its formal beauty is that *Detective Riko* is a genre film. *Detective Riko*, as the title suggests, is a crime-police drama but with a difference — Riko is a single mother with a two-year-old son. The child's father is a colleague whose wife, to whom he is committed, is dying. Riko has an ambivalent attitude towards her lover and their relationship and is primarily concentrating on doing her utmost to maintain her professional life and be a good mother. *Detective Riko* is in equal measure a character study and a police/detective film; while not avoiding explicit violence, the film refuses to fulfill the generic demand that violence be central to the narrative.

Detective Riko, as far as I know, has really no precedent in the Japanese cinema. Perhaps the closest equivalents are Juzo Itami's *A Taxing Woman* (1987) and *A Taxing Woman's Return* (1988) but these works employ a very different strategy presenting the woman as a kind of comic 'superhero' who, because of her determination and cunning, succeeds in defeating masculine aggression and social injustice; unlike Riko, she is unencumbered either by parenthood or

romantic involvement, permitting the tone of the film to be predominantly comic. The films aren't intended to be read as 'realist' works in regard to everyday life; rather, they encourage fantasy or at least a larger-than-life vision of the heroine's accomplishments.

In the Hollywood cinema, there have been various attempts in the 1990s to reinvent the crime film/ detective genre from a woman's perspective. Arguably, these films owe a debt to 1980s women's detective fiction of which the most distinguished examples are Sara Paretsky's novels, featuring V.I. Warshawski as a female detective who is clearly modeled on the male private eye image developed in 1930s fiction by writers such as Raymond Chandler. Although V.I. Warshawski isn't simply a male in drag, the novels tend to preserve the traditional characteristics of the private eye as a hard-drinking, tough-talking loner who exists somewhere between being a representative of legal justice and an outsider to the social system. Jeff Kanew's *V.I. Warshawski* (1991), starring Kathleen Turner in the title role, was totally unsuccessful in translating Paretsky's heroine into a filmic creation; in fact, the film's commercial and artistic failure seems to have discouraged other filmmakers from trying to transpose any of the highly popular quasi-feminist female detective figures found in contemporary genre literature into the film medium.

Although departing from the detective/private eye formula, there have been several commercially and critically successful films which presented women as law/authority figures. Jonathan Demme's dramatic *The Silence of the*



Lambs (1991) and Joel Coen's comic *Fargo* (1996) manage to integrate their respective heroines into the story line but in both films extreme violence is used to sustain the narrative movement. Although the violence doesn't displace the heroine's centrality, these works are primarily defined by their generic conventions. Similarly, Jon Amiel's *Copycat* (1995), which has two heroines, relies heavily on the presence of its serial killer villain to give the film definition. A somewhat different approach to the crime/detective genre in light of feminist thinking is Renny Harlin's *The Long Kiss Goodnight* (1996). While an ambitious effort and fitfully successful in dramatizing its gender concerns, the film never seems to be sure whether it wants to parody the genre itself using its female lead character as part of the send-up or present Geena Davis as a woman whom the audience should take seriously as she, in the context of a melodramatic action narrative, struggles to reconcile her identity as a high-powered government agent who has been programmed as a killing machine with that of a mother. And, from another perspective, Ridley Scott's *G.I. Jane* (1997) can be seen as a variant on the placing of a woman at the centre of a male-defined genre that, unlike the western, has been until recently, untouched by challenges to traditional gender roles.

Arguably, unlike the above-mentioned works, *Detective Riko* is genuinely subversive. The film is never self-conscious about positioning a woman in a role that seemingly demands a male protagonist; and it refuses to concede to a potential audience demand that sensationalistic



Ryoko Takizawa as Detective Riko

violence and/or sex are necessary requirements for the film to be gratifying. *Detective Riko*, with its classical visual style and contemplative nature, may not succeed as a mainstream film in North America. Nevertheless, the film should find a substantial audience if given a chance — at present, the film doesn't have a distributor outside Japan.

I hope the interview with Satoshi Isaka functions to illustrate my appreciation of his film and allows Mr. Isaka the opportunity to express himself and his aims. Mr. Isaka's first film *Focus* (1996) won the Berliner Zeitung Prize at the 1997 Berlin Film Festival.

In addition to thanking Satoshi Isaka, I want to thank Eiko Mizuno who set up the interview and the two interpreters who attended, although their presence was mainly unnecessary as Mr. Isaka quite ably communicates in English.

I haven't provided a plot summary of *Detective Riko* as I think the story line will be clear from the interview itself.

Richard Lippe: First of all, I want to say that I liked your movie an awful lot. I think it is quite a beautiful film.

Satoshi Isaka: Thank you very much.

RL: It's very elegant. Can I ask you a few things about this film in relation to *Riko* (1997)? Was *Riko* made the same year? Were the films (*Riko* and *Detective*

Riko) made back to back?

SI: This is, how shall I say, part two.

The first film, *Riko*, is not distributed in Japan yet. We made the two films at the same time but, when the distributor saw the films, they chose the second film.

RL: Oh, I see.

SI: The story of the first film occurs before she (*Riko*) gets pregnant.

RL: So the first film hasn't been released in Japan or anywhere else.

SI: Yeah. Nobody has seen it.

RL: Has *Detective Riko* been released in Japan? Did it do well?

SI: It was released this April but only in one theatre in Tokyo and it's not been so successful.

RL: That's too bad.

SI: But the critics and the newspapers had a good reaction — but not so much people coming to the theatre.

RL: I am taking this from the festival catalogue — you are identified as an independent filmmaker rather than working in the commercial industry. Is that the case?

SI: I started my career as an assistant director on some TV series, movies — and then, after that, I did a TV series as a director and then I made my first feature *Focus* two years ago. It is an independent film.

RL: But the *Riko* films, were they set-up as commercial, studio products?

SI: No. They also were independent.

catalogue suggested that this film was produced by a commercial organization.

SI: No, the distributor was independent — the film was made for a major production company but the budget was small.

RL: I wanted to ask you about the script and your involvement. I see *Riko* was written by you and *Detective Riko* was scripted by someone else (Rika Tanaka); yet, the press release on the film says you worked closely with one of the actors in developing his character, so you did work on the *Detective Riko* script.

SI: I didn't get credit but I did many things on the script.

RL: I wanted to ask about the film's politics. It is a very strong woman centred film — in a sense, a feminist film. Was that what attracted you to the project?

SI: I didn't think of making a feminist film. Not at all. I wanted to make a new character in Japan because, in Japan, recently it is a little better but, even now, the working woman isn't regarded highly. Surely, working for the police, in the government...a single mother, people think it isn't a good image for the woman.

RL: How has that image been reacted to? You said the film didn't get a strong audience response.

SI: Critics and some newspaper write-ups said this is a new character and they feel good about it.

RL: The press release I mentioned earlier compared the Riko character to Jodie Foster's character in *Silence of the Lambs* and Frances MacDormand in *Fargo*. Were you thinking along these lines when you constructed this film?

SI: Yes. When I made the film I thought of *Fargo* and Jodie Foster.

RL: One of the things that struck me about *Detective Riko* is while it contains violence, your film is strongly character based. You give that preference over action, violence or suspense. I felt the impact of the film comes from it being a character study of Riko and several of the people surrounding her. Unlike *Silence of the Lambs*, which places so much emphasis on Hannibal Lector, you tend to deflect from that. The film

doesn't get sidetracked into other issues.

SI: Yes.

RL: Also, in terms of style and mise-en-scène, *Detective Riko* is a rigorous film in the way the shots are constructed, the pacing, the editing. It's precise and controlled and almost becomes a reflection of the character who is herself a somewhat elegant and formal person. Were you attempting to make this visual connection or is this your general style?

SI: When I make films, I think first what is the most suitable style for this story or this character. So, I change my style every movie. And, as you said, this is such a dauntless woman so I did her style.

RL: Contemporary films often use a lot of fast cutting and many close-ups so that you are almost carried through by the visuals but here there is a much more contemplative feel. You are making the audience work and this produces a different relationship to the film. Are there any directors you like particularly or that you have modelled your work on?

SI: I love, the best one is Mr. Kurosawa and also I love Mr. Coppola and the Taiwanese director, Mr. Hou Hsiao-Hsien. I love these three.

RL: With *Detective Riko*, were you involved with the editing of the film?

SI: No. On this film, I didn't edit but on *Focus* I did.

RL: Do you usually do long takes?

SI: Yeah.

RL: I noticed the somewhat sombre but intense colors of the film. Were you working on controlling the visuals through color?

SI: Not particularly so. Basically, before shooting, I talk to the director of photography to decide what is the best look for this film.

RL: I was taken by the scene in which Riko and Aso meet at a bar and talk about their respective lives and loves — she tells him about her child and being unwed and he tells her about meeting a woman and falling in love. I liked the feel of the scene. It has an intimacy, a stillness and a sense of sharing. It seemed to me that was there partly because of the narrative, partly because of the actors and partly because of the

way you controlled the light and color.

SI: It is a director's job. (Laughter).

RL: Riko has a professional life and a personal life and the two are at odds and yet she is very committed to both. The film seems to be suggesting that she can't sustain her life as it is and needs to either make a compromise or rethink her situation. She has this very strong discipline. By the film's conclusion, has she come to the realization that she needs to be more flexible, particularly with her personal life, making a fuller commitment to the child's father?

SI: In the scene in which she washes her face and looks into the mirror, before this she was crying beside the baby. She was a little weak because of the many things that had happened. For example, because of Aso and the young guy, she knew of their relationship and the other thing. But, in washing her face and putting on her make-up, she makes up her mind, she regains her strength. She comes back to her commitment to her work. In the very end, the scene in which she meets her boyfriend, I want to make the audience think about where they can go from this point.

RL: So, she remains the same strong woman she was. That's interesting. A friend of mine saw the film and we were discussing the narrative. The narrative is quite complicated. You have this opening incident with the drug bust and then the story about the kidnapped child and the murder(s). You have these two narrative strands involve Riko and eventually they come together. But, because of the way you unravel the narrative, I found, at least on one viewing, it wasn't easy to follow the story line. As with the ending and the question of her future, do you want the audience to think about narrative construction?

SI: Yes. I always want to make the audience think for themselves, to feel. I don't explain too much.

RL: One of the things I was wondering about...The story about Riko meeting the woman in the park. You have already set up a feel of apprehension, the sense that Riko's own child may be harmed or threatened in some way...when she meets the woman in the park, it begins innocently but then Riko finds out this woman's child has been

kidnapped. Is it the case that the mother has killed her child and this is what Riko realizes when she gets upset with her son and begins to scream at him to be quite? The audience has to make this connection. You take an indirect route — we could have found out much earlier that the baby was never kidnapped. The way you tell it carries a different implication — it is Riko's realization about her own anger that allows her to make the connection.

SI: When we wrote the script, I was afraid that the audience couldn't understand what happened. Do you understand what happened?

RL: Yeah, I think I do. About the mother? That she killed her baby and then the husband had the people who knew about the killing murdered. The baby has been buried in the park under the bench and that's where they find it's bones in the scene in the rain as Riko watches the men digging.

SI: Yes.

RL: Its wonderful how you have constructed that. It carries a lot of emotional weight because of Riko's own concerns about being a mother.

SI: It is the most important thing because Riko is a mother and, so, she can understand what happened. She can sympathize.

RL: Also, is Aso supposed to be in love with the young man?

SI: Yes.

RL: So, it is a gay relationship. When he tells Riko that some years ago he fell in love with a woman, he is talking about the young man who is a part of the Yakuza.

SI: Yes.

RL: I thought so...Again, it is interesting that you make the audience work on this, the love story between the two men. Riko understands and respects this relationship. In the scene in the hospital in which the young man tells her that he would have killed her if Aso had died, she understands the kind of love that makes him say this to her. I think it is very daring of you to connect the feminist content with a gay love story....As I was suggesting, I take it a concern of the film is Riko's growing awareness about the complexities of people and her bringing this back into her own life.

SI: Yes. I didn't want to make characters completely good or bad. Everybody, everybody, even you and I, have many sides to us. I want to make characters of every kind.

RL: Again, we are going back to something like *Silence of the Lambs* where that to some extent is attempted. But, I think, you don't push the film into the area of the horrific or extreme violence. You are giving more space for an exploration of people's identity and character complexity.

SI: Yes.

RL: A sequence that is very strong is the one in which Riko is abducted and tortured by the young man who is Aso's lover. The scene in which he terrorizes her and she fights back is very disturbing. The use of violence elsewhere in the film is very different. Here, it is acted out in a very physical and brutal way. Why did you do that with this scene?

SI: When I direct, there may be some reason but I can't explain the reason completely. With that sequence, I felt it was the right approach.

RL: Does he attack her so violently because he thinks she is threatening to him or is it just a matter of making her tell what she knows about what happened to the drugs after the bust?

SI: Yes, he is just trying to force her to reveal what she knows.

RL: Also, I wanted to say that the actress who plays Riko (Ryoko Takizawa) is wonderful. She has a strong screen presence...it's a beautiful performance.

SI: Oh, thank you.

RL: Have you worked with her before?

SI: No, this is her first leading role.

RL: What are your future plans?

SI: Perhaps I can make another film next year but now we are working on the script.

RL: Another film of this type?

SI: No, maybe the next will be a comedy. I want to do every genre.

RL: Other than telling you again how much I like your film, I thank you for the interview.

SI: Thank you very much.

TORONTO FILM FESTIVAL 1998

A Conversation with Olivier Assayas on *Fin août, début septembre*

by Mark Peranson

In 1996's *Irma Vep*, the film that earned him a place in North American art cinemas, Olivier Assayas included a segment from the 1968 militant student film *Classe de lute* to exemplify political purity through cinematic art. Even though the characters of his seventh film, *Fin août, début septembre* (*Late August, Early September*), are too young to have protested in Paris, they could have been student radicals, now semi-comfortable members of society, thirty years later.

In the decade since his own tenure on the editorial board of *Cahiers du Cinéma*, Assayas has established himself as the leading stylist of a new generation of French auteurs, fluidly integrating stylistic tropes of directors like Bresson, Bergman and Tarkovsky in the context of his personal theme — youths becoming adults by confronting society's cruelty.¹ In *Fin août*, the issue is no longer exploring the conflict between ideals and reality, but coming to terms with the contemporary world while remaining faithful to the values one continually is choosing to assume as one's own.

As the 43-year-old Assayas argues in *Fin août*, this process is fragmentary and elliptical, a mix of the real and the abstract, putting character above action and reality over plot. It's hard to summarize because Assayas' unrelenting focus on the quotidian gives equal value

to almost every scene.

Most of all, *Fin août* is a relationship film, observing the everyday interactions of a system of well-educated friends and the choices they confront in their personal and professional lives over a year's time. It begins with the breakup of Gabriel (Mathieu Amalric) and Jenny (Jeanne Balibar), continuing with the illness, affair (with the much younger Véra) and eventual death of author Adrien (François Cluzet), and ending with Gabriel's acceptance of his new relationship with Anne (Virginie Ledoyen).

The film is divided into six chapters, comprised of fragments separated with fades-to-black that create a series of viewpoints around the present or absent Adrien. Each chapter's title refers to specific events within the part, but also applies to other events, and the film as a whole (e.g., "Gabriel's Real Estate Problems," "Admission," "Missed Opportunities"). This structure gathers moments, according to the

¹ Assayas' feature film filmography is: *Désordre* (1986), *L'Enfant de l'hiver* (1989), *Paris s'éveille* (1991), *Une nouvelle vie* (1993), *L'Eau froide* (1994), *Irma Vep* (1996), *Fin août, début septembre* (1998). He also directed *HHH, portrait of Hou Hsiao-hsien* (1997), and, along with Stig Bjorkman, co-authored *Conversation avec Ingmar Bergman* (1990). For an excellent analytical dissection of Assayas's work up to *L'Eau froide*, please see Kent Jones, "Tangled Up in Blue: The Cinema of Olivier Assayas," *Film Comment*, Jan.-Feb. 1996.

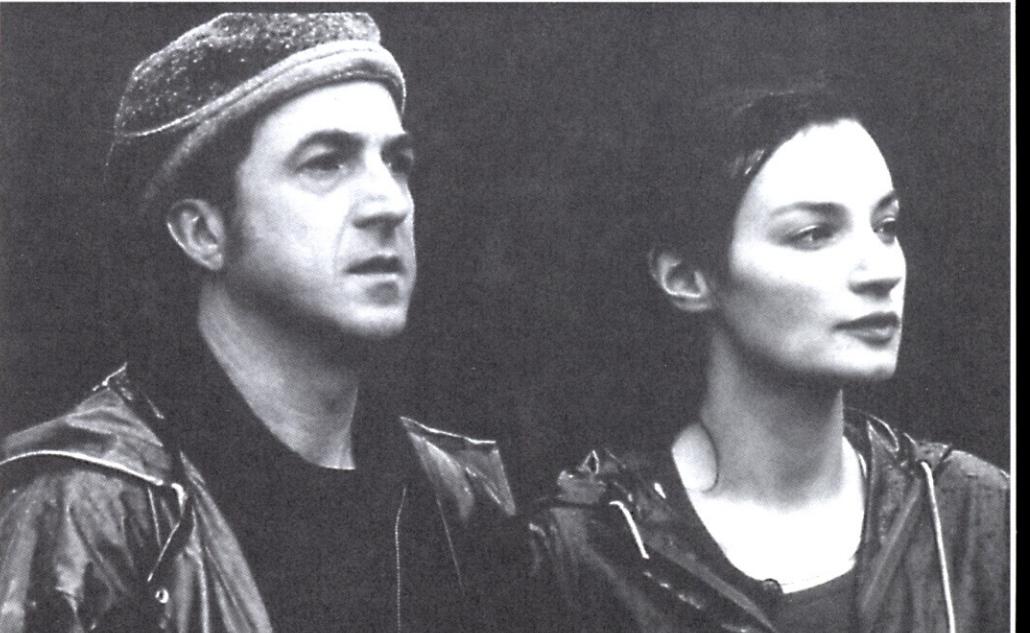
director, "that, taken as a whole, complement each other, expanding and intensifying each other to give an idea of our experience in the world."

Like Assayas' earlier films, *Fin août* has complex, malleable and real characters — secure when in relations that s/he feels are under their control, yet equally weak when in the presence of stronger others; fluid, mobile visuals; and a connection between power, art, and ordinary life. At the core of *Fin août* is a battle between the head and the heart, hearkening back to a scene in *L'Eau froide* where money, not love, becomes Rousseau's "ridiculous object."

Fin août is the latest in a series of transitions for Assayas, especially in comparison to the devastating *Une nouvelle vie*, a severe, 35mm 'Scope work. To that point, his films show a filmmaker very much concerned with "teenage problematics" in a tradition of French cinema from Truffaut to Pialat. The transition is exemplified by the title, applicable to the time of the film, the age of the characters, and both the time and age of the director. "Late August" refers to the stage of late adolescence the filmmaker Assayas is moving beyond, towards an early maturity — or "Early September" — clearly seen in his treatment of domesticity.

This also connects to Assayas' inescapability from influence, and as well as his dialectical method — crucial for understanding why he made a self-critical, autobiographical film to express the diversity of human values, situated in the urbane world of the French intellectual. Within the film itself, the influence of friends has major importance to one's daily choices; just as an artist can't escape precursors' works and theories on creation, so often behave and make choices with other people in mind, on both conscious and unconscious levels.

Fin août also moves away from the strong cinematic influence of Bergman towards a Renoirian ethical humanism, showing death as a natural event which marks both ends and beginnings. Assayas notes, his film is about "above all how life absorbs [death], first within the memory, with its mutations, approximations and deficiencies, then



Scenes from *Fin août, début septembre*.

progressively consigns it to oblivion." This may also explain the overt reference to provocative German postmodern artist Joseph Beuys, which "has a very central meaning to the film." Assayas uses allusions to communicate with an active viewer in *Irma Vep*, in particular. Besides the counterintuitive use of Beuys to exemplify beauty, Beuys created a conceptual installation called "The Silence," which comprised five boxed reels of Bergman's film. (Other artists in Assayas' mind prior to filming included David Hockney, Jacques Chardonne, and, as he explains below, Marcel Proust.)

Even though Assayas claims this film is close to his life, *Fin août* overflows with ideas as much as social reality. One of these is Nietzsche's view of the need to treat life as an aesthetic phenomenon, a strong influence on Beuys's "social sculpture" as well as the situationists, whose influence Assayas acknowledges towards the end of this interview. Another philosophical comparison is the work of Henri Lefebvre, who theorized how, as a reaction to political disillusionment, the post-war everyday allows for the conjunction of existentialism and Marxism in the form of continual willed choice.

Assayas's filmmaking — and this film in particular — offers an modern mode of narration not particularly interested in telling stories devoid of audience manipulation; for Assayas, this is expressed by capturing the essence of humanity by concentrating on the choices of individuals. *Fin août* is shot on location, in streets, apartments, the countryside, often using natural light. The feel of *Fin août*, aided by his regular cinematographer Denis Lenoir, approaches realism in the same way as the early works of the Nouvelle Vague, capturing a place and time through light as much as character or location. Like Godard, Assayas sees a world in the process of becoming (c.f., Hegel), or, like *Masculin, féminin*, "a film in the process of being made."

As he remarked following our interview the day after the world premiere of *Fin août* at the 1998 Toronto International film Festival, *Fin août* is about, "Starting from everyday things,

how we get into wider issues, while still dealing with very simple issues." His statement can also apply to our disarmingly casual conversation. Assayas clarifies his vision behind *Fin août* in a light but concrete manner, rather than providing any deeper interpretations, even if his consistently rewarding — and underappreciated — work encourages them.

Style

Mark Peranson: Why did you choose to shoot in Super 16 again, like *L'Eau froide* and ?

Olivier Assayas: Light. Because for this film I was just a little bit scared. The film is very static, its writing is very simple, with everyday life scenes, people sitting and talking. I was scared that if I shot it in 35 the weight of the camera — even the weight of the light — would make the film look a little bit more classical than I cared for. Because the material was very simple, I wanted to keep a very light approach. I was also working with very little light, physically, so I kept most of the time for working with the actors.

MP: How much was handheld?

OA: I would say about one-third. Most of the rest are dolly shots. There are whole segments that are handheld, like the second chapter is completely handheld from start to finish — that's how I wanted it to be. Then a lot of the things associated with the character of Anne were handheld.

MP: Was that to reflect her instability?

OA: It just belongs to the style of the film. This film was much tougher to approach than anything I've done in a sense that I wanted everything to be on the same level. I didn't want things to stand out. I just wanted to keep an everyday life feel to everything. It's not like other movies, where all of a sudden there are strong visuals to rely on separate from the rest of the scenes. Basically the film very much depends on my vision and my way of dealing with the situations...so I didn't have any preconceived idea. It just grew out of making the film. The only way I could deal with the material was in musical terms, using themes and connecting

themes to one actor or another. Yes, a lot of what was connected to Anne would be handheld and close-ups because I wanted to show she was in a world of her own, a little bit different from the others, so she had a different theme. Of course, there was something of her instability, as you say, anger or youth. She's younger, and has a different kind of energy than the other characters. And also, Véra is connected to the few really abstract scenes in the film. She also brings usually music with her. The style of the film grew from using very simple touches like that.

Time

MP: The elliptical use of time strikes me as similar to *Une nouvelle vie* in that the scenes you don't see are of immense dramatic importance to the film. And the difficulty in making a film that deals with the everyday is deciding when it gets redundant. You shot *Une nouvelle vie* in three hours and cut it down to two...was there a similar thing going on here?

OA: I cut it down a little, but not so much. It's not like in *Une nouvelle vie*, where there were a few very important scenes I just didn't put in the film. Here I had a much more pragmatic approach. Also because the film has no real dramatics, it's very simple, so I was just very concerned that it'd hold together, and that people wouldn't get too bored. Also, I only had so much patience for these kinds of characters. I didn't cut out things that were really important, just redundant. It meant something to me, because when I was writing there were a few redundant things that I liked to be redundant. On film, all of a sudden, you realize the actors express those things so strongly, so clearly, that you don't have to overstate them. There are a few things I simplified, but in the end the result is very, very close to how it was written.

MP: As opposed to the ellipses in *Une nouvelle vie*, why did you tell us how much time had passed in between the chapters?

OA: Well I just liked the idea that one year passes, and I like the idea of this full circle process, which just starts again after. It's like the cycle of a year.

There could be another cycle of Gabriel's life. When we leave him at the end of the film, he's at the beginning of a new cycle. It could be another story the same way.

MP: But you mention exactly how much time passes between each chapter.

OA: Oh yes, I wanted to specify time because *Fin aout* very obviously is about time. Time changes characters, changes relationships. In this film the things you see are as important as the things you don't see, and vice versa. Everything is on the same level. In the end, all the experiences in the film are experiences that can be shared by anybody. Everything happening in this film belongs to the common experience of most people, in a way or another...grief, love, desire, regret. They're very, very basic things. The gaps in the story are just things that anybody can fill in with his own emotions or experience. This elliptical way of telling the story is a way of communicating with the audience, of giving the space for the viewer to project himself into the story and recreating his own thoughts of it. Like in a novel. When you're reading a novel you are creating the images, directing it somehow. I think that in a film you can ultimately try and get a relationship with the viewer as close as the novel has with the reader.

MP: Is there anything you feel you left out?

OA: Yes, I wanted to go a little but further with the character of Anne than with other characters. It's not just that Anne has a dark side, but she suffers a little more than other characters.

MP: She strikes me as manic-depressive.

OA: Yes, in a way, but also she is very healthy in the way she's trying to deal with it. I had this one sex scene in the film which involves her with two men, and I treated it very graphically, but then when she discusses it, you realize it's very simple. She has sex, and that's it.

MP: The music also doesn't make the scene that graphic.

OA: Oh yes, at some point I used a much louder soundtrack on that scene,

and I hated it. I watched the film, and I said 'Oh, my God,' I mean, it made it look fake. I used the same music I used all the film, the music of Ali Faraka Toure, and all of a sudden I felt much closer to her. And that was the feeling I wanted. I wanted whoever is watching the film to be within her.

MP: I asked about instability because in all your films there's a central female character who has an unstable quality about her. Here Anne is aware of her instability.

OA: Yes, she's much more aware of her instability, somehow she's much more in control of it, and ultimately somehow comes to terms with it.

Influence

MP: It seems to me that your identity in the film is divided between Gabriel and Adrien, both of whom are very much concerned with style. This also works as a self-critique, similar to the use of the journalist in *Irma Vep* — Adrien's writing is insular, he describes his little world, he's not interested in telling stories, or that he can't tell stories, also a criticism that will be levelled at *Fin aout*. Are you interested in telling stories, or do you just depict what you see?

OA: Of course I'm a little bit joking with that, there's a little bit of irony. When you have ideas about filmmaking, you're constantly dealing with your own conception of filmmaking. Even filmmakers who completely deny it are always struggling with mental ideas of what film should be and how characters should function. You take a situation and you show characters, but when you're showing them, you're imposing your vision of the world on them. At some point I realized that for things to look real and feel real, you have to have the idea, and you have to have the criticism of the idea. You can't just put things there on the screen. You should always have the capacity, even inside the film, to criticize whatever you're showing or the way you're approaching your material.

Life comes out of the relationship between the thing and the contradiction. In this I just tried to use ideas, but then to capture real life.

MP: One key to all of your films is

that the viewer comes to understand of the characters as they're shown in relation to other people. And it seems there's another philosophical view in operation, that you can never really understand one character, one character can't understand anyone else, or even that characters can't understand themselves, because they're so much defined in relation to others. That's very real, but also novelistic. Is there any particular influence in this way of filmmaking?

OA: It's always very complicated, because for me there's a major influence, but it's a little bit overbearing. I'm sure that writing the screenplay is very connected with reading Proust. If I get into talking about that I will speak like someone who's been enlightened with faith or something. For me, Hegel and Proust are the two writers that have completely changed my life. Discovering Proust made complete sense to me in terms of what art can be in relation to life and how, somehow, art can understand life. You just can't deal, like Proust does, with all the layers of consciousness, the presence of the past within the present, and how everything is mixed and at the same time always in the process of becoming. In films you just can't get the same level of the complexity, or somehow you're just as complex, but in a different way. I'm sure I had a little bit of Albertine in mind when I was writing Anne. At the same time it's there, because somehow Proust proved that extraordinary things can be achieved in art, but this [film] is just a shard...

MP: One of the only allusions in the film comes with the sketch of Joseph Beuys, who created huge works that are systems which put ideas into a certain form, which is essentially what you're trying to do in *Fin aout*. Here Beuys is represented through a very simple sketch, which isn't what most people associate with Beuys.

OA: It's very important in the film, it has a very central meaning. I very much like the work of Joseph Beuys, I think he's a great artist, and I like his ideas. I like the very strong and realistic meaning his huge sculptures end up having. They are systems, but in the end express, with incredibly abstract



It's like Asian painting, something you do in thirty seconds and it's worth what someone else spends hours or years doing. In that sense, for me it's just like this image of simplicity.

MP: Which captures what Adrien sees in Véra.

OA: Oh yes, and it's really what every single character in the film is ultimately looking for. Often in the film the painting is referred to in terms of money, in terms of value...but in the end, the character it belongs to is Véra, who has the same kind of grace and purity that drawing has, and there's something completely natural that this thing which is the best of Adrien goes to the person he loves. For me it's an essential moment in the film.

Work

MP: You mentioned grief, death, regret, but also work is a major component of the film. Work is normally treated as separate from personal relationships, and you always very much deal with how the two connect.

OA: Of course. Work and everyday life. Just dealing with everyday life is also work somehow. Anybody's life deals with the way they organize their time. And everything is completely interconnected — when you have money, when you don't have money...when you have love, when you don't have love, when you have time, when you don't have time...and all those things are connected. One scene I cut exemplifies this. There was a dialogue between Jérémie and Gabriel on the way to the funeral. Jérémie is angry with Gabriel. Gabriel thinks that it's because he's sad, connected to the death with Adrien, but ultimately the reason is because Gabriel hired him to write for his dictionary, and Jérémie has given him his writings, and he didn't get a reaction. This makes complete sense, because life is going on. Even if Adrien has died, it hasn't stopped the life of any of those characters. Jérémie cares about his writing, and he's given it to Gabriel. Gabriel, because he's been working, hasn't had time to read it, or if he has read it, he hasn't had time to call Jérémie. They're driving to the funeral, and the one thing they can speak about



TOP: Maggie Cheung as *Irma Vep*, BELOW: Virginie Ledoyen in *L'Eau Froide*

means, something so human and personal. It's really disturbing that through the metal, the felt and wax, he expresses such simple, poetic and beautiful things. When I went to see his retrospective in Paris a few years ago I saw that drawing I used in the film. Somehow he could express exactly the

same thing with these huge, complex sculptures and with this incredibly simple and graceful drawing. For me all of a sudden it was this image of beauty. Just to accomplish in a few brush strokes, so simple, light and graceful, you need a moment at peace with yourself. It's complete mastery of your art.

is life. It's not even a statement, it's just a fact.

MP: In your earlier films, you also associate youth with an idealistic view of the world, and then society comes in, threatening stability, with a job, with a routine. In this film you develop a view that there are characters where this works for them without being disruptive.

OA: Oh yes, of course. The difference is the characters are older.

MP: Adrien is in a midlife crisis.

OA: He's asking questions about what he's done. He's at an age, the same way I am, where instead of going forward, you look back at what you've done and you ask yourself if it was worth doing that way. It's a very natural question. It's just that kind of time in life. And I think that also for someone like Gabriel, who's slightly younger, it's the moment where he's beyond asking himself questions about maturity, like should I be part of society. He's done things. He's at a time where he has to ask himself if his priorities are making a living, earning money or trying to achieve something? And he's a little bit scared because he doesn't know if should choose the safe path of having a good and possibly interesting job, or assume just a slight amount of risk and try to create something. They are not in teenage problematics or post-teenage problematics, which are — I disagree with society as it is, I disagree with society's values. Everybody does somehow. Few people really love today's society. It's just so materialistic. We're losing touch with reality, but then, whenever you end up being acquainted with has humanity within him. I think ultimately it's gotten stronger than anything society's becoming. As an artist, I think in the end depicting humanity, dealing with very basic human values, is good enough for me.

Ethics

MP: Before it seems to me you made very moral films, but without any judgement. This film seems less concerned with morals just as it's less concerned with dramatics. Gabriel, at one point he says he doesn't like being judged, he's such a bad judge of characters himself because he's hard to get

along with. You said before you lack patience for some of these characters, so obviously you don't approve of everything they do. But what holds you back from judging?

OA: It's all this Jean Renoir idea, that everybody has his reasons. I do think that...I'm concerned with ethics. I'm really concerned with ethics, as opposed to morals, definitely. I believe that everybody has some kind of responsibility in the way they live, in the choices they make, but in every single choice they make. I think everybody's completely involved in every choice he makes, but I don't feel he has to account for it. I don't feel I have any right to judge anybody's decisions, but I think everybody's decisions makes complete sense.

MP: In their own system of interacting.

OA: Oh, yes, I just don't have to judge. In this movie I try to create characters who have made choices in their everyday lives, in the way they work or don't work, in the way they make money or don't make money, love or don't love or have trouble accepting love. I'm just showing them making decisions. Everything they do is a decision somehow. I think it's really enough for me. In films you have some kind of responsibility, because you are recreating the world in a way or another. People are just trying to find some kind of comfort or peace but within the values of small communities, and now more and more in terms of art, you have people showing on screen the values of their own small world. It's so easy, and for me, depressingly stupid. Art is not about understanding yourself and your friends, but about understanding other people, and showing them and their values in a believable way. What right do you have to judge them? Especially when you're an artist and you're in a very privileged position.

MP: Would it be accurate to say there's no moral to this film?

OA: I don't think there is any moral.

MP: Giving the sketch to Véra is also an essential moment because Jenny and Jeremie consider giving her the ring. She comes home and opens up her bag, and the first thing we see is the

ring, but then she pulls out the painting. It's a slight but very powerful moment, but also involves audience manipulation.

OA: For me, it's the one moment where I'm playing with the audience's emotions in a way, which is something I hate doing, but I just like that moment. I'm just playing with the vision the audience has about the characters. Because by showing the ring first, all of a sudden the audience is judging Jérémie and Jenny. But then, all of a sudden, the reality, that they have reacted like you, because your first reaction is to think that the painting is the one important material thing that Adrien owned, and all the people in the audience feel Véra deserves it. Ultimately Jenny and Jérémie think exactly the same thing.

MP: And they read Adrien's diary, also.

OA: I think the only characters I'm negative towards in any way are those in a position of power. Which is the TV documentary producer, the publisher.

MP: Even when Gabriel gets the job, and he brings Adrien into the office and asks him if he wants to write, he's using his power in a certain way, to prove himself superior over Adrien, or embarrass him.

OA: Yes, exactly. I think a small moral in the film is to be very careful with the way that power can control other people. Because when you're in a position of power many people depend on you, and somehow you can't always be completely aware of the complexities happening within that person's life or mind. In the scene with the publisher, both Jenny and Jérémie have a notion there's one thing worthwhile in Adrien's papers — his diary about his love for Véra.. And it can just be discarded just like that because ultimately it depends on the publisher...

MP: It can also be discarded because his love for Véra was transferred to them..

OA: Yes, of course. Somehow love is transferred to them, and they're trying their best to do something with Adrien's legacy. But all of a sudden there's a stupid moral idea the publisher has, that Adrien loved a sixteen-year

old girl, it's illegal, people get hysterical about those kind of stories...so why get into trouble about something like that? All of a sudden it can be discarded, something that's possibly beautiful, that may be a moving piece of writing.

Creation

MP: The experience in working on *Irma Vep* must have influenced you on this film. Both films are striking for their improvisatory feel. Both also deal with a system — you can't isolate any part separate of the whole — with a central character, Maggie and Adrien, that exerts their influence on others.

OA: Yes, absolutely, that's very true, I hadn't even thought of it in those terms.

MP: And it strikes me as very different from your earlier films, especially as the tragedy comes from something external, not from the characters' actions, it's a disease that Adrien gets. I also found that there's a different way you deal with domestic life here. You seem much more open to it. How connected is your life to your filmmaking? Is this a film that you could make at this time in your own life, where things are coming together?

OA: Oh yes. For me it's really hard to analyze it too much, as it just came to me, but everything you're saying makes complete sense. But I do feel this movie is a very logical step in many ways. With *Une nouvelle vie*, I really felt like I had gone all the way in a certain approach to filmmaking. I somehow got where I wanted to be, and I didn't feel like going further in that direction. I had to completely reconsider my idea of filmmaking and my whole approach to life, somehow. All the films I made were incredibly close to my ideas, not to my life. I thought that somehow I had to connect my filmmaking and my life. It's a process I started when I did *L'Eau froide*, which was a very clearly autobiographical film, using fictional elements. *Irma Vep* was an essay on the relationship between art, cinema, life and how all these things interconnect. Somehow these two movies helped me to come back to filmmaking. It's like a recovery process, or a metamorphosis. Making this film, which is certainly the most autobiographical movie I've ever

made, allowed me to feel completely at ease with creating characters, telling a story, making the film. I just feel like it's all one.

MP: It seems very important in this film than life is ultimately more important than art. And the people who are least happiest are those who live their lives artistically in a dramatic sense. Anne says she can't really escape the drama..

OA: Yes, but she's doing her best. Of course art and life are connected, and ultimately when you are an artist it's egotistical to say whatever you're doing will be recognized and stay on. Who cares? It's very vain. Somehow it makes sense to feel that when you are making films you are expressing something with your time. You have a perception of the world, where you're living, and you think you can capture something of the way the impression is made. You see some paintings or photographs, and you feel the world at that time vibrating. You see a street by Daguerre, or a landscape by Bonnard, and you are there. It's extraordinary, it's so modern. It seems very contemporary because the light is real. When you see academic paintings of the same time, they feel old. Whatever the future does with your art, it can't affect your life: what's important is the way you're living. Everybody has some kind of artistic responsibility in how he leads his life. What you're doing today is the one important artistic statement you can make. Ultimately, people are building their lives like works of art, in the sense that people need to have some kind of vision of what they're doing, how they're using their time, what they're constructing. But you're constructing something temporary which disappears when you disappear, even if it has some kind of meaning for you.

MP: Gabriel asks his brother Thomas, "Why is everything about building things?"

OA: Yes, exactly, because he's concerned with escaping building things. But you can't. Ultimately he's building something in a different way. He feels his brother accepts values he didn't invent. Somehow Gabriel wants to invent his own values. I don't know if

it's Guy Debord or Raoul Vaneigem, one of the situationists said the future will be about the conscious creation in the domain of private life. That's what I mean.

MP: And in the end he decides to integrate his work and his life in a way he couldn't do at the start of the film, by deciding to work on something more personal.

OA: Yes, exactly.

Transition

MP: Are you working on another project?

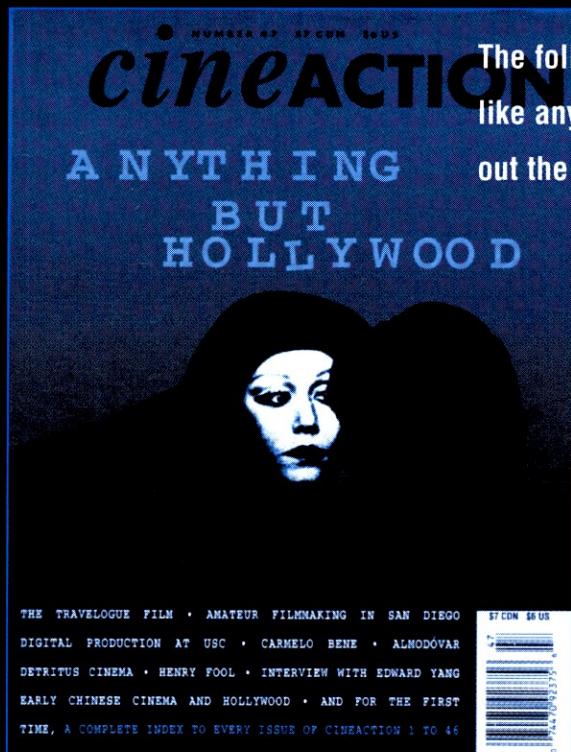
OA: I finished this film last week, so it's really early. But I have this project I've been dragging on for ages, and now it looks like it's going to happen. It's the first time I'm adapting a novel. It's a period piece from the beginning of the century by Jacques Chardonne called *Les destines sentimentelles*. I wrote the adaptation with Jacques Fieschi two years ago. I feel I can express things in that film that I care for. The problem is that I have to work with big name actors, big crew, big budget, and I'm a little scared of the weight. For me, Jacques Chardonne is the literary equivalent of Pierre Bonnard, meaning somebody with a very light touch. He's all about light, and colour and nuances, and to film him you shouldn't film him the way you'd film Jane Austen. But because it has costumes, locations, it's very expensive, so there are a different set of problems. The producer of the film — he has the rights to the book — is a little bit more of a business person that I would care him to be.

MP: You've always had control over your films...

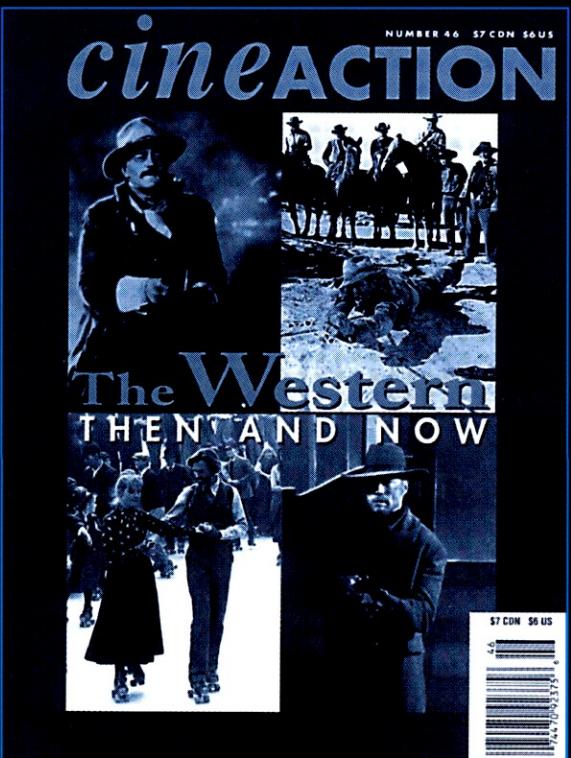
OA: Total, so I'm really spoiled. Now it looks like if I want this film to happen, it can happen, so I just have to very clearly draw the line what I know I can get away with, and beyond which point I won't have enough freedom, control, and security. It's a question I've never had to ask myself in terms of filmmaking. I'm just very cautious.

*Mark Peranson is a film critic for Toronto's NOW Magazine. *Fin août, début septembre* will be released in 1999 in the United States by Zeitgeist Films.*

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